

M. FETHULLAH GÜLEN

PROPHET
MUHAMMAD:
ASPECTS
OF HIS LIFE

VOL. 1

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OF HIS LIFE

BY

M. FETHULLAH GÜLEN

VOL. 1

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About the Author

Known by his simple and austere lifestyle, Fethullah Gülen, affectionately called Khodjaefendi by those who love him, is a scholar of remarkable proportions. He was born in Erzurum, eastern Turkey, in 1938. Upon graduation from Divinity school in 1958, he obtained his license to preach and teach. Ever since, he has striven to communicate to society at large the importance of human understanding and tolerance in the quest to solve society's ills and our spiritual needs. His social reform efforts, begun in the 1960s and showing no signs of stopping, have made him one of the most well-known and respected public figures in Turkey, and has led numerous people throughout the world to do their best to implement his vision.

Though simple in outward appearance, he is considerably original in his ideas and activity. He embraces all humanity, and is deeply adverse to unbelief, injustice, and deviation. His belief and feelings are profound, as are his wise and rational ideas and approaches to problems. An example of love, ardor, and feeling, he remains extraordinarily balanced in thought, deed, and treatment of matters.

Contemporary intellectuals and scholars in Turkey who know him, whether tacitly or explicitly, acknowledge Fethullah Gülen as one of the most serious and important thinkers and writers, and among the wisest activists, of twentieth-century Turkey. Some even attribute this status to him throughout the Muslim world. Despite this and his leadership of a new intellectual, social, and spiritual of Islam and its com-

munity, which has the potential to embrace a considerable part of the world, he considers himself no more than a humble servant of God Almighty and a most modest friend among other people. *Desire for fame is the same as show and ostentation, and is a poisonous honey extinguishing the spiritual liveliness of the heart, is one of the golden rules he follows.*

Gülen has spent his life trying to voice the cries and laments of Muslims, in particular, and of humanity, in general, as well as their beliefs, hopes, and aspirations. While bearing his own sorrows, he feels crushed by the sorrows arising from the suffering of others. He feels each blow falling upon humanity as if it were delivered first to his own heart, and is so deeply and inwardly connected to creation that once he said: *Whenever I see a leaf fall from its branch in autumn, I feel as much pain as if my arm were amputated. That is why he always suffers inwardly.*

A brief biography

Fethullah Gülen was born in Korucuk, Erzurum Province, Turkey. After completing his education, he was posted to Edirne, where he began his career in teaching and providing religious and social service. He then fulfilled military service, returned to Edirne to teach again, and then was transferred to Izmir, Turkey's third largest province. This proved to be a turning point. Since childhood, he had dedicated himself to the religious life and taken a deep interest in the conditions of Muslims and of humanity in general. While in Izmir, he traveled from city to city to give lectures on subjects ranging from Darwinism to social justice in Islam, and visited places frequented by average people to convey his message.

He had long dreamed of a young generation that would combine intellectual "enlightenment" with pure spirituality, wisdom, and continuous activism. Being extraordinarily

knowledgeable in religious and social sciences and quite familiar with the principles of material sciences, he instructed his students in almost all of them.

The first students who attended his courses in Izmir became the vanguard of the revived generation willing to serve his ideals. The small group attracted to his opinions by the end of 1960s has increased rapidly and steadily ever since. The generation captivated by his tears, sincerity, altruism, and love has served, and continues to serve, people without expecting any material reward. Having the support of the majority of the Turkish people, they preach, teach, and establish private schools all over the world; publish books and magazines, dailies and weeklies; broadcast television and radio programs; fund scholarships for poor students; and avoid politics and political ambition.

He is well-known for his ardent endeavor to strengthen bonds among all people, for, as he puts it so eloquently, the bonds that join us are far more than those that separate us. As a step toward this goal, he was a founding member of the Journalists' and Writers' Foundation, which promotes dialogue and tolerance among all social strata and is welcomed warmly by almost everyone. On a personal level, he visits and receives leading Turkish and international figures. He also meets regularly with leading journalists, columnists, and intellectuals of all persuasions.

One of his unequivocal beliefs is that *if you wish to keep the masses under control, deprive them of knowledge, for only through knowledge can tyranny be overthrown*. Totally dedicated to solving social problems, he believes that justice can only appear and be maintained through an adequate universal education. Only this development will engender sufficient understanding and tolerance in society for the need to

respect the rights of others. To this end, he continually encourages society's elite and local leaders, industrialists, and businesspeople in his community to support quality education for the needy.

His tireless efforts have begun to bear fruit, as students graduating from the schools opened in Turkey and Central Asia have taken top honors in university placement tests and consistently finish at the top in International Knowledge Olympics. These schools, all of which are financed by private donations and run as trusts, already have produced a number of world champions, especially in physics, chemistry, biology, and mathematics.

Gülen maintains that *if a nation wishes to remain ignorant and free, while others enter a state of civilization, it expects what has never been and can never be*. In the area of education, he has inspired the use of mass media, notably television, to inform the public, especially those without a formal education, of pressing social matters. He believes that democracy, as a political and governing system and despite its shortcomings, is the only viable choice at this time. We must make it work, for people shall always demand freedom of choice when it comes to their own affairs and how they express their spiritual and religious values.

Do not despair in the face of adversity, and do not yield to anarchists, he emphasizes time and again, *and never despair, for despair buries human progress, kills the will to succeed, and chokes and drowns us*.

Perceiving a positive change in the global spiritual climate, he is optimistic about the future. He envisions a twenty-first century of spiritual dynamism that will dust off our long-dormant moral values, an age of tolerance and understanding leading to the cooperation of civilizations. The human spirit

shall triumph on the way to intercivilizational dialogue and the sharing of values.

Gülen bridges the past with his view of the future. His deep desire to solve social problems presents itself, in his writings, as a row of sentences set one after another like priceless pearls on a string. In his inimitable style and choice of vocabulary, he offers a way out of the “material quicksand” in which we find ourselves today.

People today are searching for their Creator and the purpose of their creation, Gülen contends. We ask such questions as Why was I born? What is the purpose of my life? What is the meaning of death, and what does it demand from me?, and he provides practical and convincing answers. In his speeches and writings, one encounters statements like: *Humanity has come to a crossroads: one leads to despair, the other to salvation. May God give us the wisdom to make the right choice.* He also discusses how we can search for the truth.

He does not believe that there is any material shortage in the world, and sees no justifiable reason why millions of people should starve to death. Calling for inequitably distributed wealth to be channeled through private charities to the needy, he has spearheaded the establishment of charitable organizations to help the needy directly.

A unique social reformer, Gülen has synthesized positive science with divinity by reconciling their “differences.” In his writings and public speeches, he brings the ideologies and philosophies of the East and the West closer together. He states that the days of gaining supporters through brute force are over, for in today’s enlightened world persuasion and convincing argument are what count: *Those who resort to brute force to reach their goal are intellectually bankrupt souls.*

In our daily life, we must maintain the delicate balance between material and spiritual values if we want to enjoy serenity and true happiness. Thus, we must guard against unbridled greed.

A true leader who leads by example, he lives as he preaches and thus presents humanity with an ideal model to emulate. As a student of hadith, *tafsir* (Qur'anic commentary), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), Sufism, and philosophy he occupies his rightful place among his contemporaries in the Islamic sciences.

His works

Fethullah Gülen has passed his life in studying, teaching, traveling, writing, and speaking in order to alleviate the suffering engendered by the spiritual wasteland of the twentieth century. He contributes to several journals and magazines, and writes the editorials for *Yeni Umit*, *Sizinti*, *Yagmur*, and *The Fountain* magazines. His sermons and discourses have been recorded on thousands of tape and video cassettes, and many books have been compiled from his articles, sermons, and answers to questions. Some of his books are as follows:

- *Asrın Getirdiği Tereddütler* (4 vols.; vol. 1 has appeared as Questions and Answers about Faith)
- *Kalbin Zümrüt Tepeleri* (translated as :Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism)
- *Çağ ve Nesil* (This Era and the Young Generation)
- *Ölçü veya Yoldaki Işıklar* (4 vols.; vol. 1 has appeared as Pearls of Wisdom)
- *Zamanın Altın Dilimi* (The Golden Part of Time)

- *Renkler Kuşağında Hakikat Tomurcukları* (2 vols.; vol. 1 has appeared as Truth through Colors)
- *Kırık Mızrap* (Broken Plectrum), a collection of verse
- *Fatiha Üzerine Mülâhazalar* (Reflections on *Surat al-Fatiha*)
- *Sonsuz Nur* (2 vols., Prophet Muhammad: Aspects of His Life)
- *Yitirilmiş Cennet'e Doğru* (Towards the Lost Paradise)
- *İnancın Gölgesinde* (The Essentials of Islamic Faith).

Some of his books, such as *Asrın Getirdiği Tereddütler*, *İnancın Gölgesinde*, *Sonsuz Nur*, *Kırık Mızrap*, have been translated into German, Russian, Albanian, and Bulgarian.

The present book is a compilation of the sermons he gave every Friday of 1989 to introduce young people to Prophet Muhammad in all his aspects. In this translation, to be published in two volumes, you will meet the *Rahmat li al-'Alamin* (the Mercy for all the worlds) as Prophet, educator, statesman, commander, sociologist, economist, psychologist, moralist, preacher, orator, father, and husband; a most humble, compassionate, brave, wise, gracious, gentle, and truthful member of humanity; and the most sincere and beloved servant of God. Also, you will find out how to follow his example.

A General Introduction

I would like to introduce the reader to the exemplary life of the blessed Prophet Muhammad¹ and his distinguished, exalted personality. The “water of life” for the salvation of humanity should be made known to everyone.

Prophet Muhammad is the pride of humanity. For the past 14 centuries, many thinkers, philosophers, scientists, and scholars, each a radiant star in our intellectual world, have stood behind him in respect and admiration, and taken pride in belonging to his community.

It is enough to appreciate and understand his greatness that even after so many attacks, we still hear the words “I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God” from minarets five times a day. We rejoice while his name is being proclaimed from minarets, as do the dead and other spiritual beings. Despite concerted efforts to corrupt our young people and lead them astray, they continue to hasten to him, although they cannot perceive the full reality of Muhammad.

¹ In any publication dealing with the Prophet Muhammad, his name or title is followed by the phrase “upon him be peace and blessings,” to show our respect for him and because it is a religious requirement to do so. A similar phrase is used for his Companions and other illustrious Muslims: “May God be pleased with him (or her).” However, as this practice might be distracting to non-Muslim readers, these phrases do not appear in this book, on the understanding that they are assumed and that no disrespect is intended.

Time has not caused us to forget the truth about him. He is so fresh in my mind that if I mention his holy name, it is as if I am about to meet him. Once, while on pilgrimage to his radiant city, Madina, I felt that he was about to appear and welcome us. As time progresses, some thoughts become obsolete, but he remains as fresh as a rosebud in our hearts. And so whenever we hear his name mentioned from the minaret, we immediately abandon our work and, accepting his invitation, hasten to mosque.

If we had been allowed to describe him as others have been described, if we had used the social and educational institutions, then perhaps our young people would be following his way. Despite our shortcomings, many pick up their “glasses” and run to fill them from this “pure spring.” In every part of the world, including the United States, England, France, and Germany, an Islamic revival is occurring. Muslims are sowing these lands with the seeds of a happy future. Islam is everywhere healthy and flourishing as it did during the Time of Happiness—the time of Muhammad.

The same is true of predominantly Muslim lands. Those Muslims whose devotion to Islam was largely unconscious and devoid of deep perception or research have given way to a new generation who are consciously following Muhammad in the light of science and advances in knowledge. Those who were previously exploiting schools and universities on behalf of unbelief are now running to him. Even such well-known people as Maurice Bucaille and Roger Garaudy have seen the falsehood of their systems and are hastening to him.²

² Maurice Bucaille is a French physician and scientist who accepted Islam about 25 years ago. Roger Garaudy is one of the ideologues of communism of our age, and a previous general secretary of the French Communist Party. He chose Islam about 20 years ago.

Muhammad as the most beloved of hearts

I wonder whether we have fully recognized the most beloved of hearts. Even I, who have been performing five daily prayers since the age of 5 and striving to be a servant at his door, wonder if I can recognize him. Have we been able to enthuse love into the hearts of our recent generations by describing the ultimate source of all love and enthusiasm?

If only humanity had known Muhammad, they would have fallen in love with him as Majnun fell in love with Layla.³ Whenever his name is mentioned, they would tremble with joy in anticipation of entering the ethos that surrounds him and those following his way wholeheartedly.

We can love only those whom we know and only to the extent of our knowledge. Our enemies have tried to make us forget him, to ensure that his name is no longer mentioned. Since he is supported by God, all obstacles have been torn down, and the younger generation submits to him as joyfully as one dying of thirst does upon finding water. His mighty tenderness and compassion will embrace every “thirsty” person who comes to him.

You must have noticed that when you come to the Friday prayers, the congregation consists mainly of young people. Have you ever asked why, despite the prevalence of misguidance and rebellion, young people come to mosques and sit despite cold and other difficulties? There is only one attraction: Muhammad. Whether we can grasp it or not, souls and hearts rush to him as moths to a candle. Even those “winter flies” who have not been so fortunate will soon turn to him. Scientists and great thinkers will study him. Those who

³ Majnun and Layla are two legendary figures in who loved each other very deeply. (Tr.)

are currently enemies will soon be bosom friends, and will take refuge in his warm welcome. In his time, even his enemies admired him.

He once related a dream: "They weighed me against ten people of my community, and I outweighed them. Then they weighed me against a hundred and then a thousand, and I outweighed them all."⁴ He also related: "I was weighed against my whole community, and I outweighed it."⁵ He outweighs all people of intellect, piety and spirituality, and faith and knowledge, for all other beings were created because of him. It is reported that God said to him: But for you, I would not have created the spheres.⁶

Muhammad describes the meaning of creation

The universe is a book. If Muhammad had not been created, this book would not have been understood. To create an incomprehensible book is a waste of time and effort. As God is beyond such things, He created Muhammad to describe the meaning of creation to humanity. God would be his teacher, and the Earth and firmaments would be subjected to him. He would answer all the eternal questions: "Who and where am I?" "Why have I been created?" "What is my ultimate destination?" and "Who is my guide during this journey?"

Muhammad provides creation with meaning and answers such questions. If he had been fully recognized, he would have been truly loved. Although we only know him a little, we still love him.

⁴ Qadi Iyad, *Shifa' al-Sharif*, 1:173.

⁵ Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 2:76.

⁶ Al-Ajluni, *Kashf al-Khafa'*, 2:232.

Let me narrate an incident that occurred during a visit to Muhammad's holy city. The atmosphere was overpowering. Something occurred to me: I pray to God every morning, saying seven times: "O my God, save me from Hellfire and make me enter Paradise among the company of the godly people." There can be no believer who does not wish to enter Paradise. However, in this environment I asked myself: "If they were to invite you to Paradise through any of its seven gates, which would you prefer entering into the *rawdah* (the area in the mosque next to the Prophet's tomb) or entering Paradise?" Believe me, I swear by God that I said to myself: "This place is more appealing to me. I have had the chance to rub my face against the soil of my master, at whose door I prefer to be a chained slave rather than anything else in the world. I do not want to miss this chance."

I believe this is the desire of every believer. When I was blessed with this great opportunity, I was with a member of the Turkish Parliament, Mr. Arif Hikmet. He told me he had promised himself that he would roll in the soil like a donkey when he stepped across the border and entered the land of Madina. This great man kept his promise. When I remember this incident, I cannot prevent my eyes from watering.

Muhammad's message embraces humanity and jinn

Since Prophet Muhammad came with a sacred Law that will never be abrogated, a Message that embraces humanity and jinn, and has hundreds of miracles excelling those of all other Prophets, he is the head of all Prophets. Therefore, he has the core of all their miracles and their unanimous confirmation. In other words, all other Prophets' agreement on the same faith and the testimony of their miracles support Muhammad's honesty and truthfulness. He is, at the same

time, the master and leader of all saints and scholars of purity and profound knowledge who have attained perfection through his teaching and guidance, and through the light of his sacred Law.

In addition, he has the core of their wonders, their unanimous affirmation, and the strength of their verified conclusions. Since the way they have followed to reach the truth was the one opened and left open by him, all of their wonders and conclusions established through meticulous research and intuition, as well as their consensus on the same faith, support his Prophethood and truthfulness. This is why his coming was promised by all the Prophets before him. God made a covenant with them that they would believe in him and support him.

God took a covenant with the Prophets: I have given you of Book and Wisdom; then there shall come to you a Messenger confirming what is with you—you shall believe in him and help him. He said: "Will you affirm this, and take My load on you in this matter?" They answered: "We affirm it." He said: "Bear witness, and I shall be with you among the witnesses." (3:81)

All of the Prophets led their lives in perfect loyalty to their promise. When Prophet Muhammad was about to make his *mi'raj* (Ascension to the Heavens), he led the prayers before the souls of all the other Prophets.⁷ All of them, including Abraham, Moses, Noah, and Jesus, displayed their desire to become his *muezzin* (the one who calls to prayer).

In the Bible, Jesus repeatedly gave his disciples the glad tidings of Muhammad's coming. According to John (see 14:16, 26, 30; 16:7), he said:

⁷ Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*; Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya*, 3:139.

It is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the helper will not come. I have much more to tell you, but for now it would be too much for you to bear. When, however, the spirit of the Truth, the lord of the world, who reveals the truth about God comes, he will lead you to the truth.

I wonder if we realize how unique he was as the head of family. Do we know how he brought up his children or grandchildren, each of whom would have been a great leader in any succeeding century? He dealt with his wives so successfully that there was no serious disagreement among them. He is beyond all comparison as father, husband, or human being.

He had such sublime virtues in his blessed being, such exalted qualities in his Messengership, and such precious merits in the religion and sacred Law that he preached, that even his bitterest enemies could find no fault with him. Since he combines function, religion, and the most praiseworthy virtues in his personality, he is certainly the embodiment, master, and representative of all perfections and high, laudable virtues found in creation.

This perfect a commander challenged the world with only a few followers. He repelled all who opposed his teachings and was never defeated, although he had no mortal teachers and never attended a military academy. He was so informed about science that he told his followers about almost all the major events that would occur until the Last Day. It was as if he were watching television or reading from an unseen tablet.⁸

Some time ago, a friend brought me a video cassette in which Keith Moore, a Canadian pediatrician who had realized how the Qur'an describes the development of the human

⁸ *Sahih al-Muslim*, "Fitan, 22-25"; *Ibn Hanbal*, 1:4.

embryo in the womb, declared his conversion to Islam. On the same tape, a Japanese psychologist who had discovered that Islam explains many problems that baffle modern scientists, was trying to get his tongue around the Arabic words to make the same declaration.

Who taught all these scientific facts to Muhammad? Certainly he did not speak on his own. Whatever he spoke was a Revelation revealed to him by his teacher, the One Who knows everything, Who is All-Knowing and All-Aware. As science advances, humanity will come to discover a new aspect of his personality and will regret not having known him earlier.

His Companions knew him and loved him more than they loved themselves. They were prepared to sacrifice their lives to protect him. For example, he dispatched a group of teachers to the Hudayl tribe at their request. The Hudayli unbelievers betrayed their teachers and killed most of them. Zayd ibn Dasina and Hubayb were handed over to the Quraysh, then enemies of the Muslims.

When they were about to be executed, someone asked Hubayb: "Don't wish that Muhammad were in your place so that you could be with your family in Madina?" Hubayb was startled, and replied: "I would rather be cut into pieces than wish Muhammad were in my place. I don't want even a thorn to hurt his blessed foot in exchange for my being returned to my family." Hubayb prayed that God would convey his wish of peace and greetings to His Messenger, and inform him that he had remained loyal to him until he died. Meanwhile, the Prophet informed his Companions of Hubayb's martyrdom and returned his greetings.⁹

⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 4:76.

Sumayra, from the Dinar tribe, hurried to the battlefield when she learned that the Muslims had experienced a reverse in Uhud. They showed her her father's corpse, and those of her husband and sons, but she ignored all of them. She just kept asking what had happened to the Prophet. When somebody guided her to him, she threw herself to the ground at a short distance from his feet and exclaimed: "All misfortunes mean next to nothing to me, provided that you are alive, O Messenger of God!"¹⁰

He was so loved that his Companions would have given their lives if it meant that he could live forever. But, of course, he was mortal like other created beings. The appointed hour drew near, and he had to say farewell to his friends of 23 years. Mu'adh ibn Jabal had been shuttling between Madina and Yemen carrying the Prophet's Message. On the day he was about to leave, the Messenger of God told him: "Mu'adh, leave now for Yemen. When you come back, you will probably visit my mosque and my tomb." These words were enough to bring Mu'adh to the point of emotional collapse.¹¹

Our problems can be solved only by following his way

The problems of our time will be solved by following the way of Muhammad. This has been acknowledged by unbiased Western and Eastern intellectuals. As Bernard Shaw once admitted, humanity can solve its accumulated problems by turning to Prophet Muhammad, who solved the most complicated problems as easily as one drinks coffee.

¹⁰ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 4:54; al-Haythami, *Majma' al-Zawa'id*, 6:115.

¹¹ Ibn Hanbal, 5:235.

Humanity is waiting for the return of the Muhammadan spirit, for the Message of Muhammad. When they turn to him to solve their problems, they will be saved from exploitation, freed from misery, and attain true peace and happiness. This second revival has already begun, despite the aversion of unbelievers:

They desire to extinguish the light of God with their mouths; but God will perfect His light, even though unbelievers are averse. He has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may uplift it above every religion, even though the polytheists are averse. (61:8-9)

God will uplift His religion, and people will run to Prophet Muhammad. In him, they will find peace and happiness. Humanity finally will learn to live in security through him, and it will seem as if they are already living in Paradise despite still being in this temporary world. This will take place despite the presence in every country of unbelievers, wrongdoers, hypocrites, and those who ignore him. The Lord of the Prophets, whose name we proclaim from our minarets five times a day, sooner or later will enter the hearts of all human beings. And since Prophet Muhammad was a man of peace, humanity will attain happiness through the Message he brought: Islam.

They were serving, apart from God, what hurts them not, neither profits them, and they say: "These are our intercessors with God." (10:18)

They were so degraded in thought and morals that, as reported by Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, they would cut their idols into pieces and eat them. The only excuse offered was that they were following in the steps of their forefathers:

When it is said to them: "Follow what God has sent down," they say: "No. We follow that wherein we found our fathers." (2:170)

They also buried their daughters alive:

When any of them is given the good tidings of a girl, his face is darkened and he chokes inwardly, as he hides himself from the people because of the evil of the good tidings that have been given to him, whether he shall preserve her in humiliation, or trample her into the dust. (16:58-59)

Women were despised, not only in pre-Islamic Arabia but also in the Roman and Sassanid lands. The Qur'an openly declares that men will be questioned concerning this: *When the female (infant) buried alive is questioned—for what crime was she killed?* (81:8-9).

After Muhammad had declared his Prophethood, a Companion told him what he had done with his daughter:

O Messenger of God, I had a daughter. One day I told her mother to dress her, for I was taking her to her uncle. My poor wife knew what this meant, but could do nothing but obey and weep. She dressed the girl, who was very happy that she was going to see her uncle. I took her near a well, and told her to look down into it. While she was looking into the well, I kicked her into it. While she was rolling down, she was shouting: "Daddy, Daddy!"

As he was recounting this, the Prophet sobbed as if he had lost one of his nearest kinsfolk.¹²

Hearts had become hard. Every day a pit was dug in the desert for an innocent girl to be buried. Human beings were more brutal and cruel than hyenas. The powerful crushed the weak. Brutality was taken for humanity, cruelty received approval, the bloodthirsty were exalted, bloodshed was considered a virtue, and adultery and fornication were more common than legal marriage. The family structure had been destroyed.

This dark period was followed by Islam. In addition to eradicating all other evils, God declared in the Qur'an: *Do not slay your children because of the fear of poverty: We provide for you and for them* (6:151).

The Prophet's Life before his Prophethood

Prophet Muhammad was brought up in God's sight and care. His father 'Abd Allah died before he was born, which meant that he had to put all his trust in God and submit completely to Him. He visited his father's tomb in Madina years later, cried his heart out, and on his return said: "I wept for my father and entreated God to forgive him."

With the death of his father, God deprived him of all human support and directed him to the realization that there is no deity but God, Who has no partners.

His grandfather and uncle protected him to some extent, but he came to perceive that his real guardian was God. Behind every phenomenon and every cause and effect, he could discern the hand of the Single Creator of the universe

¹² Darimi, *Sunan*, "Muqaddima," 7-8.

and of causes. The Oneness of God would be manifested to him in the light of Divine Unity. That is, he would be tested in this world of wisdom, where material causes and means have a part in every attainment, and so would have to use necessary material causes and means and take all necessary measures to attain anything. He would have to depend wholly on his Lord and ask Him for any help, thereby demonstrating that only God creates the result and gives success.

As a result of his father's death, he came to be called the "Matchless Orphan Pearl." In reference to this, God addressed him years later:

Your Lord shall give you, and you shall be satisfied.
Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you?... Did
He not find you needy and suffice you? As for the
orphan, do not oppress him, and as for the beggar,
scold him not (93:5-6, 8-10).

The Matchless Orphan Pearl also lost his mother, Amina, at an early age. When she died in Abwa at age 25 or 26 on her way back from visiting her husband's tomb in Madina, Muhammad was only 6 years old. Thus, he learned the pain of having no father or mother. Indeed, he would learn and suffer everything, for he was sent to teach everything to humanity and to be an example in every respect.

His grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib, a respected Makkan elder, undertook his protection. For this reason, God saved 'Abd al-Muttalib from misfortune. He embraced his beloved grandson, and always offered him the seat of honor in his house.

He felt that Muhammad would grow up to save humanity. Muhammad was so noble and well-mannered that his grandfather anticipated his Prophethood. He was not the first of his forefathers to do so, however: Ka'b ibn Luayy, who some

consider a Prophet, predicted that the Last Messenger would be raised from his own progeny. He mentioned him by name:

Suddenly Prophet Muhammad will appear;
He will give tidings, and is truthful in his tidings.

‘Abd al-Muttalib, whom even the great army of Abraha could not bring to tears, wept bitterly when he took to his deathbed. When his son Abu Talib asked what was wrong, he replied: “I’m weeping because I’ll no longer be able to embrace Muhammad,” and added: “I’m afraid something might happen to my Matchless Pearl. I entrust him to you.”

Abu Talib assumed Muhammad’s protection and, in return, his son ‘Ali would be blessed with being the father of Muhammad’s progeny. After Prophethood, the Messenger of God said to ‘Ali: “Every other Prophet’s progeny descended from himself, but my progeny will descend from you.” ‘Ali would be the father and the greatest saint until the Last Day, as the representative of the Prophet’s sainthood. This is Abu Talib’s reward for helping Muhammad.

Abu Talib protected Muhammad with great care. Ibn Ishaq, among other historians and biographers, relate that he took his nephew to Syria in a trade caravan when he was 10 or 12 years old. They stopped near Damascus and left him, as he was the youngest, to watch the caravan. From his nearby monastery, the Christian monk Bahira was observing the caravan. He was expecting the arrival of the Last Prophet, and so always studied people. He noticed that a cloud followed the caravan, stopping and starting when it did so, so that one of its members would be shaded.¹³ He thought: “This is a spe-

¹³ Busiri, in his famous *Qasida al-Bur‘a* (Eulogy of Bur‘a) mentions this incident, saying: “A cloud hovers over his head and protects him from the sun.”

cial characteristic of Prophets. The expected Prophet must be in that caravan."

When the caravan stopped near his monastery, Bahira invited its members over for a meal. Noticing the cloud still hovering over the caravan, he asked Abu Talib if someone had been left behind. Abu Talib answered that they had left a young boy to watch over their things. The monk asked them to fetch him. When Muhammad came, Bahira took Abu Talib to one side and asked him about his relationship with the boy. "He is my son," Abu Talib answered, but Bahira disputed this, saying: "He can't be your son. According to our books, his father must have died before his birth." Then he added: "Let me give you this advice. Take this boy back immediately. The Jews are envious. If they recognize him, they'll harm him." Abu Talib made an excuse to the other caravan members and returned to Makka with his nephew.¹⁴

Prophet Muhammad made a second journey when he was 25 years old, with the trade caravan of Khadija, a respected widow he would later marry. On the journey, he encountered Bahira once more. The monk was very pleased with this second meeting, and told him: "You will be a Prophet, the Last Prophet. I wish that God would allow me to live to see you raised as a Prophet. I would follow you, carry your shoes and protect you against your enemies!"

Another major event of Muhammad's early life was the *fijar* (sacrilegious) war that occurred during his later teens. This was the fourth war that violated the sanctity of the sacred months (Dhu al-Qa'dah, Dhu al-Hijjah, Muharram, and Rajab) and the sacred territory of Makka. Its immediate cause was two men's jealousy and animosity. One belonged

¹⁴ Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 1:191.

to the Banu Kinanah (a confederate of the Quraysh tribe) and the other to the Qays-‘Aylan (an important clan of the Hawazin tribe). The future Prophet, who would end all injustice and lawlessness, helped his uncle Zubayr ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, who represented Banu Hashim in the war, gather the arrows shot by the enemy.

Another important event was his presence at the meeting that resulted in the *hif al-fudul* (the alliance of the virtuous). This league against injustice was sponsored mainly by the Banu Hashim and the Banu al-Muttalib tribes. It was formed to ensure that foreign merchants would no longer be deprived of their rights, as happened when the Qurayshi ‘As ibn Wa’il usurped a Yemeni merchant’s goods. The Yemeni appealed to the Qurayshi leaders for help, but they ignored him.

When the Banu Hashim, Muhammad’s clan, heard of this, they decided to form the *hif al-fudul* and force the return of the merchant’s money. They also took an oath that whenever they someone in Makka, whether citizen or stranger, suffered an injustice, they would offer their support until justice was done. Muhammad was so impressed with its noble objectives that he would say long after: “I attended the conclusion of an agreement at ‘Abd Allah ibn Jud’an’s house. I would not exchange it for the best material gain. If someone appeals to it in Islam, I would respond.”

Muhammad’s childhood and youth were a prelude to his Prophethood. Besides his other exalted and laudable characteristics, everyone agreed upon his truthfulness and trustworthiness. He never lied, cheated, broke his word, or participated in pagan rituals. He was called “the Truthful, Trustworthy Man” even by his bitterest enemies. People would say:

If you have to travel and need someone to look after your wife, entrust her to Muhammad without hesita-

tion, for he will not even glance at her face. If you want to entrust your wealth for safeguarding, entrust it to this trustworthy, honest man, for he will never touch it. If you look for someone who never tells a lie and never breaks his word, go directly to Muhammad, because whatever he says is true.

Those who knew him from his childhood immediately believed in his Prophethood: Abu Bakr, 'Uthman, Talha, Zubayr, Abu Dharr, and Yasir, among others. When 'Ammar told his father that he believed, the latter responded: "If Muhammad says that God is One, it is true. He never lies."

In the early days of his Prophethood, Prophet Muhammad once summoned the Qurayshis to the foot of Abu Qubays hill. He asked them: "Would you believe me if I told you an enemy host was waiting behind this hill to attack you?" Everyone answered that they would, even his uncle Abu Lahab, who would become his bitterest enemy.¹⁵

When humanity was in dire need of someone to destroy unbelief and breathe new life into the world, God raised Muhammad to stop all forms of wickedness. In the words of Ahmad Shawky:

The sun of guidance was born,
and the entire universe was illumined.
A smile appeared on the lips of time,
and his praises were sung.

When he appeared on the horizon of Madina years later, the pure, innocent children of that illumined city would sing:

The "full moon" rose upon us from the hills of Wada',
So it is incumbent upon us to thank God so long as
Those who pray and entreat Him continue to do so.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Tafsir," 1:111; *Sahih al-Muslim*, "Iman," 355.

¹⁶ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 3:241.

The awaited Prophet

The Torah and the Psalms. A Companion once asked God's Messenger to talk about himself. He said: "I am the one for whose coming Abraham prayed and of whom Jesus gave glad tidings."¹⁷ This alludes to the following Qur'anic verses:

(Abraham prayed): "Our Lord, raise up in their midst a Messenger from among them who shall recite unto them Your signs, and teach them the Book and Wisdom, and purify them. Verily you are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise." (2:129)

When Jesus, son of Mary, said: "O children of Israel! I am indeed a Messenger of God to you, confirming that which was [revealed] before me in the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, whose name is Ahmad [the Praised One]." (61:6)

The Messenger of God was expected. All preceding Prophets spoke of and predicted his coming. The Qur'an (3:81) specifically states that God made a covenant with the Prophets that they would believe in and help the Messenger who would come after them and confirm the Message that they brought.¹⁸

Although subjected to distortion and alteration, the current versions of the Torah, the Gospel, and the Psalms still contain verses alluding to Prophet Muhammad. The late Husayn Jisri found 114 such allusions and quoted them in his *Risalat al-*

¹⁷ Muttaqi al-Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummal*, 11:384.

¹⁸ Behold, Allah took the Covenant of the Prophets, saying: "I give you a Book and Wisdom. Then a Messenger comes to you, confirming what is with you. Believe in him and help him." Allah asked: "Do you agree, and take this Covenant as binding?" They replied: "We agree." He said: "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses."

Hamidiya. We cite a few examples here, beginning with: *The Lord came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran* (Deuteronomy 33:2).

This refers to the Prophethood of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, respectively. Sinai is where Prophet Moses spoke to God and received the Torah. Seir, a place in Palestine, is where Prophet Jesus received Divine Revelation. Paran is where God manifested Himself to humanity for the last time through His Revelation to Prophet Muhammad.

Paran is a mountain range in Makka. It is mentioned in the Torah (Genesis 21:19-21) as the desert area where Hagar was left by her husband Abraham to live with her son Ishmael. The Zamzam well also is located there. As stated in the Qur'an (14:35-37), Abraham left Hagar and Ishmael in the valley of Makka, which was then an uninhabited place between the mountain ranges of Paran.

It is because of such explicit predictions in the Torah that the Jews were expecting the Last Prophet and knew that he would appear in Makka.

The verse of Deuteronomy, according to the Arabic version published in London (1944), continues: *He came with myriads of holy ones; in his right hand was an axe of fire with two edges*. This refers to the promised Prophet, who would have many Companions of the highest degree of sainthood and would be allowed—even ordered—to fight his enemies.

The following verses also promise his coming:

The Lord said to me [Moses]: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you among their brothers; I will put My words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to My words that the

Prophet speaks in My name, I will Myself call him to account." (Deuteronomy 18:17-19)

It is clear from these verses that a *Prophet like you among their brothers* means a Prophet from Ishmael's line, for Ishmael is the brother of Isaac, the forefather of the Children of Israel. The only Prophet who came after Moses and resembled him in many ways (e.g., bringing a new law and waging war against his enemies) is Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an points to this: *We have sent to you a Messenger as a witness over you, even as we sent to Pharaoh a Messenger* (73:15).

'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr, an ascetic warned by the Prophet not to neglect sleeping with his wife and to fast only on alternate days, is reported to have said: "It was common knowledge to the communities of previous religions that God would send a Prophet to humanity as a bearer of good tidings and a warner. I personally read in the Torah these verses about him:

We have sent you, O Prophet, to humanity as a bearer of good tidings and a warner, and as a support and refuge for the common folk. You are My servant and Messenger. I have called you Mutawakkil [the one who puts his trust in God]. He is not one rude, repelling and angry, and shouting in the streets. He does not repel evil with evil; instead, he excuses and forgives. God will not make him die before He guides through him the deviating nation to the right path by declaring there is no deity but God."¹⁰

This report was confirmed by 'Abd Allah ibn Salam and Ka'b al-Akhbar, the most learned scholars of the Jewish community at the time of the Prophet. They later converted to Islam.

¹⁰ Bukhari, "Buyu'," 50; Ibn Hanbal, 2:174.

We also read about Muhammad in the Psalms of David:

He will rule from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the Earth. The desert tribes will bow before him, and his enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarsish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present gifts to him. All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him, for he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy, and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given to him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. Let corn abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. May his name endure for ever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. (Psalms 72:8-17)

The Gospels. More emphatically and frequently than any other Prophet, Jesus gave good tidings of Muhammad. In the Gospel of John, Jesus promises his arrival using several names:

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Paraklit will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. (John, 16:7-8)

Here, Prophet Muhammad is referred to as the *Paraklit*. This Greek word means “the Distinguisher between Truth and Falsehood.” Christian interpreters have given it various meanings, such as Counselor (*Gideons International*), Helper (*American Bible Society*), or Comforter (*The Company of the Holy Bible*), and claim that it refers to the Holy Spirit. But they have never been able to establish whether the Holy Spirit came down after Jesus and did what Jesus said it would do.

If, according to Christians, the Holy Spirit is Archangel Gabriel, he came many times to Prophet Muhammad to bring Divine Revelations. Further, Jesus mentioned and predicted the Paraklit with other names but the same function, as seen below:

When Paraklit comes—the Spirit of truth—who comes from the Father, he will testify about me. (John 15:26)

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you. (John 16:12-14)

I will not speak with you much longer, for the Prince of this world is coming. And I possess nothing of him. (John 14:30)

Who has come after Jesus other than Prophet Muhammad, as the Comforter who has comforted human beings against their fear of death, worries of the future, and spiritual ailments? As the Helper, who has helped humanity attain real peace and happiness in both worlds? As the Prince of the world, who has ruled almost half the world for fourteen centuries and has become the beloved of billions? As the Spirit of truth, who has testified to Jesus, brought glory to him by declaring his Prophethood against the Jews' denial and the Christians' false deification, and restoring his religion to its pristine purity through the Book revealed to him?

What shortcomings do Western Christians attribute to Prophet Muhammad, in contrast to Jesus and other Prophets, that, while almost all Middle Eastern Christians believed in him and became Muslim within a few decades of his death, they persist in denying him?

Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, a great Sufi saint, expresses in the following stanza the good tidings of Prophet Muhammad found in the Gospel:

In the Gospel M̄stafa is mentioned with his attributes.
In him is the mystery of all the Prophets; he is the
bringer of happiness. The Gospel mentions him with
his external form and features, and also with his per-
sonal virtues and Prophetic qualities.

The Old and New Testaments, despite the questionable authenticity of their current versions, still contain references to Prophet Muhammad. We have quoted some of these. If, one day, the original copies or the least altered copies of the Torah and the Gospel are discovered, they will contain explicit references to the last Messenger. This may be deduced from the Traditions that say Christianity will be purified of its borrowed elements.

Many others awaited the Prophet. Owing to the numerous predictions of his coming, everyone was waiting for Prophet Muhammad. In that dark era of human history, humanity was waiting for one who would destroy unbelief and breathe new life into the world. Judaism and Christianity, being God-revealed religions in origin, had no more to offer. Those who had studied the old books without prejudice, especially the monk Bahira, were waiting for him to come.

Many Makkans also were waiting, one of the foremost being Zayd ibn ‘Amr, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab’s uncle. He had rejected idolatry, led a pure life, and used to address people as follows: “There’s no good in the idols you worship. I know of a religion that will soon be taught and spread. It will be proclaimed no later than a few years from now, but I don’t know whether I’ll live long enough to witness it.”

According to ‘Amr ibn Rabi’a, Zayd gave a detailed description of the expected Prophet:

I am expecting a Prophet who is about to come. He will appear among Ishmael’s descendants and ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s grandsons. He is of middle height, neither too tall nor too short. His hair is neither curly nor straight. His name is Ahmad. His birthplace is Makka. His people will force him to leave Makka, and he will emigrate to Yathrib (Madina), where his religion will spread. I have traveled from place to place searching for Abraham’s religion. However, all the Jewish and Christian scholars I spoke to advised me to wait for him. He is the Last Prophet; no Prophet will come after him. I may not live long enough to see him, but I have believed in him.

At the end of his introduction, Zayd told ‘Amr ibn Rabi’a: “If you live long enough to see him, greet him for me.” Years passed before Prophet Muhammad declared his Prophethood. ‘Amr ibn Rabi’a, having declared his faith to the Prophet, explained what Zayd had told him and conveyed his greetings. Muhammad returned his greetings and added: “I saw Zayd in Paradise, trailing his robes.”²⁰

Among those seeking the truth was Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a Christian scholar and paternal cousin of Khadija, wife of Muhammad. When the first Revelation came, Khadija told Waraqa what had happened. Waraqa replied: “Muhammad is a truthful man. What he saw is that which occurs at the beginning of Prophethood. The being who came to him is Gabriel, who also came to Moses and Jesus. Muhammad will be a Prophet. If I live long enough to witness his declaration of Prophethood, I will believe in him and support him.”²¹

²⁰ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 2:223.

²¹ Bukhari, *Bad’u al-Wahy*, 3.

One of those seeking the Last Prophet was the Jew ‘Abd Allah ibn Salam. The Jews had such confidence in him that they called him “the lord, son of a lord.” His greatness equaled that of even the greatest Companions, such as Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, and God would consider his testimony to the Qur’an equal to the testimony of a people:

Say: “Have you considered? If it be from God, and you do not believe in it, and a witness from among the Children of Israel bears witness to its like, and believes, and you wax proud, God guides not the people of the evildoers.” (46:10)

This great Companion describes how he found the Prophet:

When God’s Messenger emigrated to Madina, I went to see him, as did everyone else. He was sitting amidst a group of people when I went in, and saying: “Give food to others and greet them.” His speech was so sweet and his face so charming that I said to myself: “I swear by God that one with such a face cannot lie.” Without delay I declared my belief in him.²²

The Jews and Christians of that time recognized God’s Messenger. As stated in the Qur’an, They recognize him as they recognize their sons (2:146). After his conversion, ‘Umar asked ‘Abd Allah ibn Salam if he had recognized God’s Messenger. “I recognized him,” Ibn Salam answered, and added: “I may doubt my children, my wife might have deceived me, but I have no doubt about God’s Messenger being the Last Prophet.”²³

Although the Jews and Christians recognized him, most envied him and, out of prejudice and envy, did not believe:

²² *Ibn Hanbal*, 5:451.

²³ *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn al-Kathir*, 1:140.

When there came to them a Book from God confirming what was with them—and they aforetime prayed for victory over the unbelievers—when there came to them what they recognized, they disbelieved in it; and the curse of God is on the unbelievers. (2:89)

After his conversion, ‘Abd Allah ibn Salam said to God’s Messenger: “O Messenger of God, hide me in a corner and then summon all the Jewish scholars in Madina to ask about me and my father. Their assessment will certainly be positive. Then let me come out to declare my conversion.” God’s Messenger accepted this suggestion.

When the Jewish scholars gathered, God’s Messenger asked them what they thought of Ibn Salam and his father. All of them answered: “They are among our noblest and most learned people.” Upon this, God’s Messenger asked again: “How would you react if he affirms me?” They responded: “It is impossible that he will affirm you!” Ibn Salam then came out and declared his conversion, whereupon the Jewish scholars immediately changed their attitude and retorted: “Ibn Salam is the most wicked among us, and the son of the most wicked.”²⁴

Prophet Muhammad was one who had been sought for centuries. Salman al-Farisi was one of those seekers. Originally a Magian (a fire worshipper), he had left his native Persia due to his burning desire to find the eternal truth. Before embracing Islam, he worked for several Christian monks, the last of whom advised Salman on his deathbed:

Son, there is nobody left to whom I can commend you.
But according to what we read in our books, the Last
Prophet is about to appear. He will come with the pure
creed of Abraham and will appear in the place to which

²⁴ Bukhari, *Al-Anbiya*, “Bab Khalq Adam,” 2.

Abraham migrated. Nevertheless, he will emigrate to another place and settle there. There are explicit signs of his Prophethood. For example, he will not eat of charity but will accept gifts, and the seal of Prophethood will be between his shoulders.

Now, let Salman narrate the rest of his story:

I joined a caravan heading for the place mentioned by the late monk. When we arrived at Wadi al-Qura', they sold me to a Jew as a slave. When I saw gardens of date palms, I thought the Prophet would emigrate to this place. While I was working there, another Jew from the Banu Qurayza bought me and took me to Madina. I began working in his date-palm garden. There was no news yet of God's Messenger. However, one day I was harvesting dates when a cousin of my Jewish owner came up hurriedly. He said in great anger: "Damn it! The people are flocking to Quba. A man from Makka, who claims Prophethood, has come. They think he's a real Prophet."

I began to tremble with excitement. I climbed down from the tree and asked: "What are you talking about?" My owner saw my excitement and slapped my face with the back of his hand, saying: "It doesn't concern you, mind your own business!"

On the same day, as the sun set, I went to him in Quba and gave him as alms the food I had brought with me. God's Messenger did not touch it, but said to those around him: "Help yourself to this." I told myself: "This is the first sign." On another occasion I gave him something as a gift. He accepted it and ate it with his Companions. "This is the second sign," I told myself.

Once, I attended the funeral for a deceased Companion. I came close to God's Messenger in the cemetery. After greeting him, I stood behind him in the hope of seeing the Seal of Prophethood. His shoulders were bare, and the seal was just as the monk had described it. I couldn't help kissing it in tears, after which I told him my

story. He was very pleased and wanted his Companions to hear my story.²⁵

People who sincerely sought him found him. Whoever seeks him will find him, whereas those who remain obstinate and ruled by their evil-commanding selves will drown in unbelief and hypocrisy. Mughira ibn Shu'ba narrates:

One day I was with Abu Jahl in Makka. God's Messenger came over and invited us to accept Islam. Abu Jahl rebuked him, saying: "If you are doing this so that we will testify before God in the other world that you performed your mission of Prophethood, we will do it. Leave us then, O man, to ourselves!" When God's Messenger left us, I asked Abu Jahl if he admitted Muhammad's Prophethood. He said that he did, and then added: "I know he is truly a Prophet. Nevertheless, we compete with the Hashimites in everything. They have been boasting of providing food and water to the pilgrims. Now if they begin to boast of having a Prophet, I won't be able to endure it at all."²⁶

This is typical of the thoughts cherished by the Abu Jahls of the past and the present. Intelligent people who are not prejudiced and whose willpower is not paralyzed cannot help but believe in Islam and God's Messenger. In this respect, God says to His holy Messenger: *We know well that their talk grieves you; in truth they deny not you, but it is the signs of God that the evildoers condemn* (6:33).

How could they accuse him of lying, for he was known by everybody as al-Amin (the truthful one)? The testimony of one of his bitterest enemies, 'Utba ibn Abi Rabi'a, proves that even his enemies admitted his truthfulness.

²⁵ Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 1:228-34.

²⁶ *Kanz al-'Ummal*, 14:39-40; *Ibn Kathir*, 3:83.

The Qurayshi leaders met to discuss how to prevent the spread of Islam. They sent 'Utba in the hope that he could persuade the Messenger to stop. He asked: "Who is better, O Muhammad, you or your father?" God's Messenger did not answer, probably because silence is the best answer to such an absurd question. 'Utba continued: "If your father was better than you, he cannot have been following the religion you are now preaching. If, by contrast, you are better than your father, then I am ready to listen to what you have to say."

God's Messenger inquired: "Is that all you intend to say?" 'Utba said that it was, and fell silent. Then, God's Messenger knelt and began reciting from *Surat al-Fussilat*. By the time he reached: *But if they turn away, then "I warn you of a thunderbolt [as fell in times past upon the tribes] of 'Ad and Thamud"* (41:13), 'Utba was trembling as if caught by fever. He had to put his hand on the lips of God's Messenger and said: "Please stop, for the sake of the God in whom you believe!" 'Utba returned home bewildered.

The Qurayshi leaders were waiting for him anxiously. Fearing that 'Utba might have accepted Islam, Abu Jahl knocked at his door and, when admitted, angered 'Utba by saying: "I heard Muhammad treated you very generously and feted you, and in return you believed in him. This is what the people are saying." Angrily, "Utba replied:

You know I don't need to be feted by him. I am richer than all of you. But his words shook me. They weren't poetry, nor did they resemble those of a sooth-sayer. I don't know how I should respond. He's a truthful person. While I was listening to his recitation, I feared that what happened to 'Ad and Thamud might happen to us.²⁷

²⁷ Ibn Kathir, 3:80-81; Ibn Hisham, 1:313.

They had been expecting a Prophet for a long time. Everybody knew al-Amin's character, and no one had ever heard him lie. They were charmed by his personality and the Qur'an's eloquence, but yet could not overcome their pride and arrogance, or the envy and rivalry, and proclaim their belief. Nor could they bring their habits and lifestyle into accord with his Message. Is this not true of all those who, knowing the truth, persist in unbelief?

Why Prophets are sent

To illuminate humanity's way. Today, our greatest problem is that many do not recognize Prophet Muhammad, and that others neglect or refuse to follow his way. God sent Muhammad, as He sent all previous Prophets, to illuminate our way:

God was gracious to the believers when He raised up among them a Messenger from themselves who recites to them the verses (of His Book) and shows them His signs [in their selves and in the universe], purifies them [of their sins and deviations], and instructs them in the Book and the Wisdom. They were evidently in manifest misguidance before. (3:164)

God sent Messengers to guide people to the truth and so they could be purified of sin. Those who were enlightened by the Messengers found the way to the Divine Presence and attained the highest rank of humanity. In the words of Ibrahim Haqqi: "God declared that He could not be contained by the Heavens and Earth. He can be known and reached only through hearts." This is why Messengers led humanity to the knowledge of God.

Those who follow this guidance are touched by Him in their innermost selves, whether it is called heart, soul, or conscience, for only that can grasp God in His entirety. Minds

cannot comprehend Him, and philosophy cannot reach Him. Therefore, the Prophets purified souls so they could be mirrors in which God might manifest Himself. Prophet Muhammad left us the Qur'an and Sunna to show us how to live in a way that fulfills the purpose for which the Prophets were sent.

Here, it is necessary to emphasize three points. First, Prophets were not ordinary men; rather, they were chosen men through whom God manifested Himself. God chose them and paid great attention to their upbringing so that they always would seek to gain His approval. Like his predecessors, Prophet Muhammad always pursued God's good pleasure. His last words were: "To Rafiq al-A'la (the Highest Abode)." His wife 'A'isha gives the following account of his last moments:

I was with him during his last moments. Whenever he became ill, he would ask me to pray for him and, expecting my prayer to be accepted through the blessing of his auspicious hand, I held his hand and prayed. During his last illness, I wanted to do the same and pray, when he suddenly withdrew his hand and said: "To Rafiq al-A'la."²⁸

Second, the world always contains successors who devote their lives to disseminating truth. They should seek what the Prophets sought, preach what the Prophets preached, and strictly follow the Prophets in enjoining good and forbidding evil.

Third, death is not total annihilation, but rather a changing of worlds without completely breaking away from this one. Prophets' deaths are special. In the case of martyrs, whose

²⁸ Bukhari, "Maghazi," 78; Muslim, "Salam," 50,51; Abu Dawud, "Tib," 19.

spiritual degree is lower than a Prophet's, the Qur'an says: *Say not of those slain in God's way: "They are dead," they are alive but you understand not* (2:154). So we cannot say that Prophets are dead. Thus Prophet Muhammad did not die as we understand this word; he only changed places and passed into another dimension or degree of life.

Those who can penetrate other dimensions with their inner faculties experience different dimensions of time and space, see different creatures, and look into things and events from different viewpoints. We consider things and events according to the stream in which we are.

Those who rise high enough to see all dimensions of this stream have the scope of their sight enlarged as they ascend higher. Thus their capacity and judgment when considering matters is more comprehensive. Such people might be sitting with us and, at the same time, in the presence of God's Messenger. While praying with us, some may be leading the same prayer in the Hereafter before the angels. There is a particular class of saints called *abdul* (substitutes). When one dies, he or she is replaced immediately with a new one who can see the Prophet whenever they wish. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, a sixteenth-century scholar, once said: "I have seen God's Messenger 28 times while awake."

To guide people to the service of God. God declared in the Qur'an: *I have not created jinn and humanity except to serve me* (51:56).

We were not created only to eat, drink, and reproduce; these are natural facts of our life and natural needs. Our main purpose is to recognize and serve God. All Prophets were sent to show us how to do this: *We never sent a Messenger before you except that We revealed to him: "There is no god but I, so serve Me"* (21:25), and:

We sent forth among every nation a Messenger, saying: "Serve God, and eschew *taghut* [idols and tyrants, Satan and his followers]." Then some of them God guided and some were justly disposed to misguidance (16:36).

God sent Prophets to guide us to His service. Their missions were the same. However, whereas the earlier Prophets were sent to their own people and for a set period, Prophet Muhammad was sent as a mercy to humanity and jinn, and for all time.

According to an authentic narration, Ibn Mas'ud reports the Prophet's preaching to the jinn:

Once God's Messenger and I went somewhere. He drew a circle around me and told me not to leave it until he returned. He left, and after a while some tumult broke out on the other side. I wondered whether something had happened to him, but as he had told me to stay put until he returned, I did so. Some time later, he returned and I asked him about the uproar. He replied: "The jinn have believed and taken the oath of allegiance to me. When some of them insisted on unbelief, fighting broke out. The uproar you heard was the fighting. This implies that my life is about to end."²⁹

God's Messenger used this last sentence to indicate that he had been sent to open the way to the guidance of humanity and jinn. Once this had been done, there would be no reason for him to live, for he would have nothing more to do. This also implies that believers should never neglect their essential duties here, and should pray, as instructed by God's Messenger: "O God, make me die if death is good for me; or else, make me live long as long as living is good for me!"³⁰

²⁹ Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan*, 24:33; *Ibn Hanbal*, 1:499.

³⁰ *Bukhari*, "Marda," 19; *Muslim*, "Dhikr," 10.

To teach people God's laws. Another purpose for sending Prophets is to reveal Divine Commandments (i.e., the five daily prayers, fasting Ramadan, paying zakat, and not indulging in any illicit sexual relations, alcohol, and gambling). This function is called Messengership. According to the Qur'an: *They deliver the Messages of God and fear Him, and do not fear anyone except God (33:39).* In addition, God told Muhammad:

O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to you from your Lord; for if you do not, you will have not performed His Messengership. God protects you against people; verily God will not guide the people of unbelief. (5:67)

The Messenger was sent to enlighten humanity about all dimensions of human life. Any neglect in delivering God's Message would amount to leaving humanity in darkness. For this reason, he continually sought unadulterated minds and hearts to which he could impart God's Message.

God's Messenger might have talked to people like Abu Bakr and 'Umar only a few times before they embraced Islam. But when it came to people like Abu Jahl, it was a different story. Each time he met them, he would say: "Proclaim there is no god but God and be saved." He would visit places where people gathered and make the same call. Occasional fairs were held in Makka and such nearby places as 'Arafat, Mina, Muzdalifah, and 'Aqabah. He would go to them every year, looking for receptive people.

When the Makkan polytheists' indifference was replaced with derision and mocking, and then with increasingly unbearable persecution, torture, and boycott, God's Messenger took Zayd ibn Haritha with him and went to Ta'if. But the people of this city also treated him harshly. The children lined up on either side of the road and threw stones at

him. As he was wearing no armor, by the time he had left the town and found a tree under which to rest, he was bleeding profusely. He held up his hands and supplicated:

O God, unto You I complain of my frailty, lack of resources and significance before those people. O Most Merciful of the merciful, You are the Lord of the oppressed and are my Lord. To whom do You abandon me? To that stranger who looks askance and grimaces at me? Or to that enemy to whom You have given mastery over me? If Your indignation is not directed at me, I have no worry. But Your grace is much greater for me to wish for. I seek refuge in the light of Your Countenance, which illumines all darkness and by which the affairs of this life and the Hereafter have been rightly ordered, lest Your wrath alight upon me, or Your indignation descend upon me. I expect Your forgiveness until You are pleased. There is no resource or power but in You.

After saying this, he noticed that a tray had been placed before him. Addas, a Christian slave from Nineveh, had seen God's Messenger being stoned and tormented from the vineyard in which he was working. Putting some grapes on a tray, he had brought them to him. God's Messenger said "In the name of God" and began to eat. This surprised Addas, for it was the first time he had heard this phrase among the polytheists. So he asked God's Messenger who he was and why he had come to Ta'if. Upon hearing the answer, "I am Muhammad, from Makka, the Last Prophet," he said with tears in his eyes, Addas remarked: "God has made me find you," and embraced Islam.³¹

Prophet Muhammad was entirely focused on his mission. As a result, the circle of light broadened day by day, and the

³¹ Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 2:60-63; Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 3:166.

party of unbelief became more and more frustrated: *They desire to extinguish with their mouths God's light; and God refuses but to perfect His light, though the unbelievers are averse* (9:32). When no more could be done in Makka, he emigrated to Madina and continued his mission there. Here he faced a different problem: established communities of hostile Jews and, eventually, a fifth column of Hypocrites who would ally themselves with his enemies.

In the twenty-third year of his mission, he began to feel that his life was almost finished. He had performed the minor pilgrimage (*'umrah*) a few times, but never the major pilgrimage (*hajj*). He was able to do this during this final year. Ascending *'Arafat* on the back of his camel, he preached what has become known as the Farewell Sermon. In it, he stressed that feuds and interest-based transactions were forbidden and that women have certain rights, and talked about family ties as well as tribal and national relationships.

A huge, tearful congregation listened to him. While speaking, he frequently asked them if he had communicated God's Message. With each positive reply, he raised his index finger toward Heaven and said: "O God, be witness!"³² In deep consciousness of Divine service, he might have thought: "God sent me to perform the duty of Messengership. Just as these people bore witness that I fulfilled this duty, I hope I may be regarded as having truly done it." He was prepared to meet God in perfect satisfaction.

To be examples. Prophets were sent to serve as examples who must be followed consciously. After mentioning the Prophets in *Surat al-An'am*, God told His last Messenger: *Those are they whom God has guided, so follow their guid-*

³² *Ibn Maja*, "Manasik," 84; *Abu Dawud*, "Manasik," 56.

ance (6:90). In particular, we are told to follow Muhammad's example: *You have a good example in God's Messenger for whoever hopes for God and the Last Day, and remembers God oft* (33:21).

God's Messenger is our leader. Just as we pray as he prayed, we must strive to live as he lived. Those who followed him during the first Islamic century were real representatives of the true Islamic life. God's Messenger says of them:

Muslim armies will arrive, after me, at the gates of cities. They will be asked: "Did any of you see the Prophet?" The answer will be affirmative, and the gates will be opened for them. Those who succeed them also will perform jihad and be asked: "Did any of you see those who saw the Prophet?" They will reply in the affirmative, and the cities will be conquered by them. As for the third generation, its members will be asked: "Did any of you see those who saw the followers of the Prophet's Companions?" When this question is answered in the affirmative, their conquest will be successful.³³

In another narration by Bukhari and Muslim, God's Messenger says: "The best of you are those who live in my period, then those who succeed them, and then those who follow them."³⁴

Those three generations strictly followed the Prophet and, accordingly, were granted great victories throughout the world. Jesus had predicted them: "The banners of the holy ones are in their hands."³⁵ They are the Companions of Muhammad and those who follow his way in every century.

³³ Bukhari, "Fada'il al-Ashab," 1; Muslim, "Fada'il al-Sahaba," 208-9.

³⁴ Bukhari, "Fada'il al-Ashab," 1; Muslim, "Fada'il al-Sahaba," 212.

³⁵ Ibrahim al-Halabi, *Sira*, 1:218.

In a Tradition, although with a weak chain of transmission, God's Messenger declares: "The pious scholars of my nation resemble the Prophets of the Children of Israel."³⁶ 'Umar submitted himself to God so sincerely that, as a servant of God, he was far more effective than had been expected. During his caliphate, Iran, Iraq, and Egypt were conquered. Muslim armies marched throughout a vast area, led by such great commanders as Abu 'Ubayda ibn al-Jarrah, Shurahbil ibn Hasana, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, 'Amr ibn al-'As, and Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan.

Jerusalem was conquered during his caliphate. When the Muslims' supreme commander asked its priests to submit the keys of the city, they answered: "We cannot see among you the man to whom we are to submit the keys." They had read in their religious books a description of who was qualified to receive the keys.

So the priests and Muslim commanders waited while 'Umar and his servant were riding a camel, by turns, toward Jerusalem. Although 'Umar ruled over lands twenty times the size of Turkey, he did not own a camel. He borrowed one from the state treasury and set out with his servant. When they approached the river Jordan, his waiting commanders on the other side were excited, praying: "O God, let 'Umar be the one riding when they reach the river, for these Romans are fond of pomp and display. They may not esteem us if they see the caliph pulling a camel ridden by a servant." But God had destined the latter scenario. When 'Umar approached, the priests noticed, among other things, several patches on his robe. This was the man described in their books, and so they gave him the keys of Jerusalem.

³⁶ Ajluni, *Kashf al-Khafa'*, 2:83.

‘Umar never deviated from the path of God’s Messenger. While on his deathbed, after being fatally stabbed by a Magian slave, he refused food and water because he was too weak. However, he always prayed when it was time to do so, even if it caused his wounds to bleed. He would say: “Those who don’t pray have nothing to do with Islam.”³⁷ An exemplary follower of God’s Messenger, his own example would be followed by succeeding generations.

To establish balance. At a time when some people lived in monasteries and others drowned in luxury, Prophet Muhammad came with the Qur’anic instruction: *Seek the Last Abode amidst that which God has given you, and do not forget your portion of the present world* (28:77).

All Prophets came to establish balance between the material and spiritual life, reason and soul, this world and the next, and indulgence and abstinence. While we should declare all that God has bestowed on us to show our gratitude and due praise for Him (*And as for your Lord’s blessing and bounty, declare it* [93:11]), we must not forget that we will have to account for every good we enjoy (*Then you shall be questioned that day concerning every good you enjoy* [102:8]).

The Prophet inculcated this principle so deeply in his Companions’ hearts that it could be seen in every aspect of their lives. For example, once when breaking fast during Ramadan, Abu Bakr, the first caliph, was offered a glass of cold water. He had just taken a sip when he suddenly burst into tears and stopped drinking. When asked why, he replied: “Once I was with God’s Messenger. He acted as if he were pushing something with his hand and saying to it: ‘Keep away from me!’ I asked him what he was doing, and he

³⁷ Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqat*, 3:350; Haythami, *Majma’ al-Zawa’id*, 1:295.

replied: 'The world appeared to me in an ideal form, with all its pomp and luxury. I pushed it away, saying: "Leave me. You can't seduce me." It withdrew and said: "I can't conquer you, but I swear by God I'll captivate those who come after you.'" After narrating this Tradition, Abu Bakr concluded: "Just now, I thought that the world tempted me with a glass of cold water, and I wept."³⁸

Abu Bakr and most Companions lived a balanced life, despite the fact that they had every chance to live in comfort.

To be God's witnesses. Prophets also were sent so that people cannot plead ignorance in the Hereafter. Regarding this, the Qur'an says: *Messengers bearing good tidings and warning, so that humanity might have no argument against God* (4:165).

Humanity, who has followed many so-called guides or leaders only to be led astray, has received true guidance through the Prophets. These servants of God were created for a special mission. Already Prophets in their mothers' wombs, their births were extraordinary. Their lives resembled a beautiful symphony, perfectly harmonious and balanced. Their words were like sweet melodies that penetrated souls.

All of existence, animate or inanimate, hearkened to them. Trees and rocks would greet Prophet Muhammad, and he would answer them. In his well-known *Qasidat al-Bur'a*, Busiri says: "Trees answered his call, prostrating." When he called them, trees came to him. Both living beings and inanimate objects acquired meaning through his advent, existence became a "cosmos" out of "chaos," and each thing became a tongue glorifying God with praise: *There is not a thing that*

³⁸ Abu Nu'aym, *Hilyat al-Awliya' wa Tabaqat al-Asfiya'*, 1:30-31.

does not glorify Him with praise, but you do not understand their glorification (17:44). The extraordinary harmony in the universe displays God's Existence and Unity. Nothing is created in vain and without purpose: *Does humanity think it will be left aimless? (75:36).*

If the Prophets had not been sent, we might have had an argument against being punished in the Hereafter. But, as the Qur'an states: *We never punish until We have sent a Messenger (17:15)*, God must send Prophets so that people can distinguish good from evil. Thus, people cannot plead ignorance when they must defend their actions on the Day of Judgment.

Characteristics of Prophets

Total dependence on Revelation and submission to God. Although every Prophet was intelligent and endowed with a comprehensive understanding and a pure soul, these play no role in God's choice of a Prophet. Most Prophets, including Muhammad, were unlettered and therefore taught by God. Prophet Muhammad, despite his illiteracy, had knowledge of the past and the future, and insight into every branch of knowledge. He did not attend any school or have any human teachers, yet even his enemies admitted (and still do) that he displayed perfect justice in family affairs, perfect competency in state administration, and perfect command of armies.

Prophets were specially brought up by God. To cite an example, the Last Prophet recalled: "I intended twice in my childhood to attend a wedding ceremony. On both occasions, I was overpowered by sleep half-way [and thus was protected against any sin I would later prohibit]"³⁹; and "While

³⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 2:350.

repairing the Ka'ba, prior to my Prophethood, I was carrying stones. As everyone did, I wrapped my garment's lower part over my shoulder to avoid injury. Part of my thigh was left uncovered. All of a sudden, the angel I had seen several times in my childhood appeared to me in all his majesty. I fell down and fainted. That was the first and last time I uncovered any part of my body that God ordered to be covered."⁴⁰

Prophets were protected by God against all sins, for they were created for a special purpose. They were protected from going astray, for even a minor deviation could result in humanity's almost complete deviation.

Prophethood is distinguished by Divine Revelation:

And thus have We revealed to you a spirit of Our command. You did not know what the Scripture was, nor what the faith. But We have made it a light whereby We guide whom We will of Our servants. And you, surely you guide unto a straight path. (42:52)

As a result, Prophets never spoke on their own accord: *Nor does he speak of (his own) desire. It is naught but a Revelation revealed* (53:3-4).

Prophet Muhammad, particularly when asked about the essentials of belief, would wait for Revelation. Sometimes the polytheists asked him to alter the Qur'an. But as it is a Divine Scripture whose wording and meaning belong completely to God, he would reply, as instructed by God: *Say: "It is not for me to alter it of my own accord. I follow nothing, except what is revealed to me"* (10:15).

Prophets submitted themselves wholly to God, and fulfilled their mission solely because God commanded them to.

⁴⁰ Bukhari, "Hajj," 42; Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 2:350.

They never compromised or deviated from their way in order to achieve success. When confronted with threats or seductive offers, they replied with words similar to those of the Prophet: "If you were even to put the sun in my right hand, and the moon in the left, I will never give up preaching my cause." He knew that the Qur'an is the Word of God, and so bore all hardship and opposition.⁴¹

Trustworthy and asked no wage. Prophets were completely trustworthy and asked no wage for their services. This very important characteristic is mentioned five times in *Surat al-Shu'ara'*. All Prophets said the same thing: "I am for you a trustworthy Messenger, so serve you God, and obey you me. I ask of you no wage for this; my wage falls only upon the Lord of the Worlds" (26:107-9, 125-27, 143-45, 162-64, 178-80).

Among his own people, Prophet Muhammad was famous for his trustworthiness even before his proclamation of Prophethood. He was known as *al-Amin* (the Trustworthy). Like his predecessors, he asked no wage for calling to God.

Prophets never thought of material gain, spiritual reward, or even Paradise—they strove only for God's good pleasure and to see humanity guided to the truth. Prophet Muhammad was the foremost in this respect. As he devoted his life to humanity's welfare in this world, he will do so in the Place of Gathering. While everybody else will care only about themselves, he will prostrate before God, pray for the Muslims' salvation, and intercede with God on behalf of others.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 2:285.

⁴² *Bukhari*, "Tawhid," 36; *Muslim*, "Iman," 326.

Those who intend to spread the perennial values of Islam should follow these practices. Any message based on an impure intention, regardless of eloquence, will have no effect on people. This point is frequently emphasized in the Qur'an: *Follow such as ask no wage of you, that are right-guided* (36:21).

Imam Busiri expresses the altruism, sincerity, and patience of God's Messenger in vivid language: "Mountains desired to run on his either side in heaps of gold, but he refused." The Messenger once said: "A day comes when I am hungry so as to endure it with patience; on another day I am full to praise my Lord, acquiring thus the reward of both patience and praising."

'A'isha reported that sometimes no food was cooked for four successive days in their house.⁴³ Abu Hurayra also reports: "Once I went into the Prophet's room. He was praying while seated and groaning. I asked him if he was ill. He replied that he was too hungry to stand. I began to sob bitterly, but he stopped me, saying: "Don't cry, for one who endures hunger here will be safe from God's torment in the next."⁴⁴

One day he told Gabriel: "It has been several days since someone has lit a fire to cook food in the house of Muhammad's family. An angel appeared and asked: "O Messenger of God, God greets you and asks if you would like to be a Prophet-king or a Prophet-slave?" He turned to Gabriel, who recommended humility. The Prophet raised his voice and replied: "I wish to be a Prophet-slave, who

⁴³ Bukhari, "Riqaq," 17; Muslim, "Zuhd," 28.

⁴⁴ Muttaqi al-Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummal*, 7:199.

entreats God in hunger one day and thanks Him in satisfaction the next.”⁴⁵

God’s Messenger used to eat with slaves and servants. Once a woman saw him eating and remarked: “He’s eating as if he were a slave.” God’s Messenger responded: “Could there be a better slave than me? I am a slave of God.”⁴⁶

God’s Messenger is, by virtue of being a slave of God, our master and that of creation, as eloquently stated by Ghalib Dada:

An exalted king, the King of
the Messengers, O my Master.
You are an endless source of help
for the helpless, O my Master.
God honored you by swearing by your life in
the Qur’an, O my Master.
In the Divine Presence, you are
the greatest, O my Master.
You are the beloved, lauded and praised
one of God, O my Master.
Our “eternal” king you are, sent to us
by God, O my Master.

Complete sincerity. Another indispensable characteristic is sincerity, which in this context means “purity of intention, to do everything solely for the sake of God.” We are told to worship God sincerely: *They were commanded only to serve God, making the religion His sincerely, people of pure faith, and to perform the prayer, and pay the alms* (98:5). God also mentions sincerity as the foremost attribute of the

⁴⁵ Ibn Hanbal, 2:231; Al-Hindi, 7:191; Haythami, *Majma’ al-Zawa’id*, 9:18-19.

⁴⁶ Haythami, 9:21.

Prophets: *And mention in the Book Moses; he was made sincere, and he was a Messenger, a Prophet (19:51).*

We worship God only because we are His servants and He has told us to do so. Obeying Him allows us to secure His approval and be rewarded in the Hereafter. Said Nursi, the great twentieth-century Turkish thinker, said: "Do what you do only for God's sake, start for God's sake, work for God's sake, and act within the sphere of God's good approval."⁴⁷

God's Last Prophet worshipped God so sincerely that people could say: "No one can remain as humble as he was at the beginning of his career or quest after attaining its height. Muhammad was an exception to this." He is so great and sublime that we still stand out of respect for him, although he used to warn his Companions: "When I come upon you, don't stand up as the Persians do (for their elders)."⁴⁸

Although his Companions had complete respect for him, he considered himself a poor slave of God. On the day he conquered Makka, he was the same as when he humbly had begun his mission. At the outset of his mission, he would sit and eat with the poor and slaves. As he entered Makka in triumph, he rode a mule in such deep submission and humility before God that his forehead touched its pack-saddle. He was prostrating before God and taking refuge in Him from being a tyrannical, haughty conqueror.

God's Messenger had one intention: to please God and worship Him sincerely. He worshipped Him at a level of perfect goodness and sincerity, as he himself stated in a famous Tradition: "Perfect goodness or virtue is to worship God as if

⁴⁷ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words*, "The First Word," 5.

⁴⁸ *Abu Dawud*, "Adab," 152; *Ibn Hanbal*, 5:253.

you were seeing Him, and while you see Him not, yet truly He sees you.”⁴⁹

Calling people wisely and with kindness. Another attribute of Prophets is calling people to the way of God with wisdom and fair exhortation. They never resorted to demagoguery and dialectics, but acted and spoke with wisdom. God ordered His Last and Greatest Messenger: *Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the best way* (16:125).

People are more than just minds or hearts. We are complex beings with many faculties, including the mind, intellect, heart, and soul. All of our faculties, even the inner-most ones, require satisfaction. The Prophets addressed all of them.

Those taught by the Prophets acquired certainty, and their view of things differed from those with limited external sight and devoid of insight and spiritual vision. Their conviction of religious truths was unshakable, and they were continually fed with Divine Revelation. They combined speech with action, knowledge with practice, and action with contemplation. ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, among others, would say: “If the veil of the Unseen were lifted up, my certainty would not increase.”⁵⁰ There was no further degree of certainty left for them to attain.

The education given by the Prophets to their disciples, or the function of the Prophets, is described precisely:

We have sent among you, of yourselves, a Messenger, to recite Our signs to you and to purify you, and to teach you the Book and Wisdom, and to teach you what you know not (2:151).

⁴⁹ Bukhari, “Iman,” 47; Muslim, “Iman,” 5:7.

⁵⁰ ‘Ali al-Qari, *Al-Asrar al-Marfu’a*, 286.

Calling humanity to God's Unity. The cornerstone of the Prophetic mission was to preach Divine Unity. All Prophets concentrated on this basic principle: *O my people, serve God: You have no god other than He* (11:84).

God has sent at least one Prophet to every people. The fact that all of them, regardless of time or place, agree on one basic principle shows that they did not speak or act on their own; rather, they did no more than teach the Message received from God. Philosophers and thinkers, no matter how great they may be, disagree among themselves because they depend on their own intellect and findings. Frequently, the same philosophical or sociological school contains different opinions.

Such a development was unknown among the Prophets, further evidence that they were taught by a Single, Eternal Teacher—God—and not guided by defective human reasoning. Such a unity of belief is also a strong evidence of Divine Unity, the fundamental principle of their mission, as declared by Muhammad: “The most meritorious of the words spoken by me and the Prophets before me is: ‘There is no god but God, He is One, having no partners.’”⁵¹

⁵¹ Imam Malik, *Muwatta*, “Hajj,” 246; Hindi, *Kanz al-‘Ummal*, 5:73.

CHAPTER 2

Prophethood: Truthfulness and Trustworthiness

According to theologians, the essentials of Prophethood are, truthfulness, trustworthiness, communication of God's commands, intelligence, infallibility, and freedom from all bodily and mental defects. These are found in every Prophet.

Truthfulness

Truthfulness is the cornerstone of Prophethood. No lies or deceit, whether explicit or implicit, were ever heard from them. The Qur'an declares: *Mention Abraham in the Book: Surely he was a most truthful Prophet* (19:41); *Mention Ishmael in the Book; surely, he was a man of his word, and he was a Messenger, a Prophet* (19:54); and *Mention Idris (Enoch) in the Book; surely he was a most truthful Prophet. We elevated him to an exalted place* (19:56-57). We also read in the Qur'an that a fellow prisoner addressed Prophet Joseph: *Joseph, O most truthful one* (12:46).

The Prophets had to be endowed with truthfulness, for God wants everybody to be truthful and extols the truthful: *O you who believe, fear God and be with the company of the truthful!* (9:119), and: *The believers are those who believed in God and His Messenger without ever feeling doubt thereafter, and strove with their souls and possessions in the way of God; those are the ones who are the truthful* (49:15).

The Qur'an praises believers who, without faltering, carry out their promises:

Among the believers are the valiants who have kept their promise which they gave to God: Some of them carried out their word [and were martyred] and the others are expecting (their turn); they have never thought of going back on their word. (33:23)

This verse extols the heroes of Uhud, a decisive turning point in Islamic history. After the Qurayshi unbelievers were defeated at Badr, they had spent a whole year preparing for a deadly retaliatory blow at the Muslims. Meeting at the foot of Mount Uhud, a few miles from Madina, the Muslims at first were victorious and the Quraysh began to flee. At this crucial point, the archers whom God's Messenger had positioned at 'Aynayn pass left their positions, against the Prophet's command, and pursued the enemy. Khalid ibn Walid, commander of the enemy's cavalry, took this opportunity to surround the Muslims from behind. As a result, the Muslims experienced a reverse. Such leading figures as Hamza, Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr, 'Abd Allah ibn Jahsh, and Anas ibn Nadr were martyred. Even the Prophet was wounded.

Let us note here that during the battle, God's Messenger, the Prophet of forgiveness and mercy who was sent as a merey for creation, raised his hands toward God and, while bleeding profusely, asked for the enemy to be forgiven: "O God, forgive my people, for they do not know."⁵²

Anas ibn Nadr was the uncle of Anas ibn Malik, the servant of God's Messenger. Although he had sworn allegiance with God's Messenger in 'Aqabah before he emigrated to Madina, for some reason he did not fight at Badr. He so regret-

⁵² *Muslim*, "Jihad," 101; *Bukhari*, "Anbiya'," 54.

ted this that he told God's Messenger: "O Messenger of God, if God allows us to confront them once more, they will see what sufferings I will inflict on them!" He fought fearlessly at Uhud, especially when the Muslims suffered a reverse. Just before being martyred, he told Mu'adh ibn Jabal with a smile: "By God, I sense the scent of Paradise behind Uhud."

The Qur'an exalts in the above verse (33:23) those martyrs who fulfilled their promise to God through His Messenger, as well as others expecting martyrdom, to show that they were true to their words. They are not the only ones extolled here; rather, all who fulfill their words and keep their promises are mentioned here.

God's Messenger was known as a truthful person even before Islam. The Makkans, even the unbelievers, called him *al-Amin* (the Trustworthy One, the Truthful). Even his enemies did not accuse him of lying after he proclaimed his Prophethood. After the Treaty of Hudaibiya (6 AH), God's Messenger sent letters to the rulers of neighboring countries. The Emperor of Byzantium received it in Syria at a time when a Makkan trade caravan headed by Abu Sufyan was in the area of Damascus. The Emperor summoned him, and the following conversation took place:

- Do the elite or the weak mostly follow him?
- The elite.
- Has anyone apostatized after converting?
- Not yet.
- Do his followers increase or decrease?
- They increase daily.
- Have you ever heard him tell a lie?
- No, never.

Struck by Abu Sufyan's answers, at that time the bitterest enemy of Islam, the Emperor acknowledged Muhammad's

position: "It is inconceivable for one who has never told a lie during his whole life to invent lies against God."⁵³ He was right. Why would a believer who had never told a lie, even in jest, suddenly begin to lie, especially against God, when he is 40 years old and getting closer to the grave?

The Makkans agreed unanimously that God's Messenger was a truthful person. Once before his conversion, Yasir asked his son 'Ammar where he was going. 'Ammar said that he was going to Muhammad. Being fully satisfied of his son's safety while with Muhammad, he replied: "Muhammad is a trustworthy person. The Makkans recognize him so. If he claims Prophethood he must be telling the truth, for no one has ever heard him tell a lie."

God's Messenger always encouraged truthfulness, as can be seen in his words as recorded in the following Traditions:

- Promise me six things and I will promise you Paradise: Speak the truth, keep your promises, fulfill your trusts, remain (sexually) chaste, don't look at what is unlawful, and avoid what is forbidden.⁵⁴
- Abandon what arouses your suspicions and follow what is certain. Truthfulness gives satisfaction; lying causes suspicion.⁵⁵
- Seek truthfulness even if it might bring you to ruin.⁵⁶
- Always be truthful, for truthfulness leads to righteousness and righteousness leads to Paradise. If you are always

⁵³ Bukhari, *Bad'u al-Wahy*, 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibn Hanbal*, 5:323.

⁵⁵ *Tirmidhi*, "Qiyamah," 60; *Ibn Hanbal*, 1:200.

⁵⁶ *Hindi*, *Kanz al-'Ummal*, 3:344.

truthful and seek truthfulness, God records you as such. Never lie, for lying leads to shamefulnes and shamefulnes leads to Hell. If you insist on lying and seek deceit, God records you as such.⁵⁷

Due to his truthfulness, God's Messenger rose to such a high rank that his nearness to God is expressed metaphorically in the Qur'an as follows: *Then he approached and came nearer; till he was [distant] two bow-lengths, or even nearer (53:8-9).*

Truthfulness always brings salvation, even if it causes one's death. We die through truthfulness only once, whereas each lie is a different kind of death. One of the most striking examples of this is the case of Ka'b ibn Malik, a famous Ansari poet who swore allegiance to God's Messenger at 'Aqabah. Although he took part in almost all the battles, he missed the campaign of Tabuk without a justifiable excuse.

The Tabuk campaign was very difficult. It took place in mid-summer and, what is more, against the Roman Empire. Although God's Messenger always kept the destination of such campaigns secret, this time he disclosed it and wanted every believer to participate. Ka'b completed his preparations but, at the last minute, uncharacteristic negligence kept him from joining the army.

When God's Messenger returned from the campaign, he asked those who had not fought why they had stayed at home. The Hypocrites lied and made excuses, but Ka'b, being unable to lie, told the truth. God's Messenger told him to leave. Thereafter, Ka'b and two other believers who had done the same thing were boycotted. On the order of God's Messenger, no Muslim met with them or spoke to them. They

⁵⁷ Bukhari, "Adab," 69; Muslim, "Birr," 105; Abu Dawud, "Adab," 80.

repented publicly, begging God for forgiveness, for 50 days. After this, it was revealed that:

As for those three, the acceptance of their repentance was delayed until, for them, the Earth, vast as it is, was straitened and their own souls were straitened to them, and they perceived that there is no fleeing from God and no refuge but with Him. Then He accepted their repentance so that they could recover their former state. Verily, God is the One who accepts repentance, Most Merciful. (9:118)

After this revelation, Ka'b ibn Malik told the Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings: "I promise to speak the truth as long as I live."⁵⁸

Truthfulness is the pivot of Prophethood. It could not be otherwise, for if a Prophet were to lie, everything connected with the Divine religion would be upset. All it takes is one lie to call a mission into question. Thus God declares:

If he [Muhammad] had invented false sayings concerning Us, We would surely have grasped him firmly, and then cut off the artery of his heart, and none of you could have withheld Us from doing this (69:44-47).

The Prophet never lied or broke his promise, either prior to or during his Prophethood. A Companion remembered:

Before his Prophethood, we made an appointment to meet somewhere. It was, however, 3 days after the appointed time when I remembered it. When I hastened to the appointed place, I found the future Prophet waiting for me. He was neither angry nor offended. His only reaction was to say: "O young man, you have given me some trouble. I have been waiting here for you for 3 days."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Bukhari*, "Maghazi," 79; *Muslim*, "Tawba," 53.

⁵⁹ *Abu Dawud*, "Adab," 82.

Some of His Predictions

Ordinary people can establish their truthfulness by their detractor's inability to provide any proof to the contrary. In the case of a Prophet who has brought a universal Divine system, people expect more. They want explanations and rules for everything: theology, law, sociology, human psychology, economics, history, and so on. Moreover, a Prophet must be proven truthful in all of them.

The explanations of God's Messenger concerning theology (Divine Essence, Attributes, and Names) are such that philosophers, religious scholars, and saints cannot compete with him. Instead, they study his explanations and try to perceive the truths behind them. In addition to these, he dealt with the most subtle matters of Destiny and human free will so ably and convincingly that if his knowledge is ignored, we cannot obtain a true understanding of such matters.

What he said about past nations and previous Prophets has been confirmed by historical research and followers of previous Scriptures. Although unlettered, never enjoying the benefit of being able to read or being taught by another person, he established the most rational, practical, and just system known to history. Islamic civilization, which based itself on this system, enabled a large portion of humanity to experience true happiness for centuries. Indeed, the universal system of life revealed to him continues to offer a unique alternative for our future in general. The happy world of the future will be built upon its principles.

Out of hundreds of his predictions, the vast majority of which already have come true, I would like to present a selection to show his truthfulness in this matter.

‘Umar reports that one day the Prophet ascended the pulpit after the dawn prayer and spoke about almost everything from the creation of the world to the Last Day. He mentioned certain past events and what will befall humanity until that Day. These predictions demonstrate that his teacher was God, the All-Knowing, and that he related only what was revealed to him. Before giving specific examples, we must clarify a few points concerning knowledge of the Unseen.

Knowledge of the Unseen. The concept of the Unseen pertains to what is suprasensory and metaphysical, or even meta-cosmic. In this sense, the past, the future, and everything beyond ordinary human senses are included in the concept of the Unseen, provided that certain concrete indications have not been manifested. In a narrower sense, the Unseen pertains only to the future. It is this second sense that is used in the following section, as I intend to concentrate on his predictions.

The knowledge of the Unseen is, first of all, with God. As we read in the Qur’an:

With Him are the keys of the Unseen, none knows them but He. He knows whatever is in the ground and the sea. Not a leaf falls but He knows it. There is not a grain in the darkness of the ground nor anything wet, fresh, or dry but is in a Manifest Record. (6:59)

Say, [O Muhammad]: “I do not tell you that with me are the treasures of God, nor that I know the Unseen, nor do I tell you that I am an angel. I but follow what is revealed to me.” Say: “Are the blind and the one who sees equal? Will you not then reflect?” (6:50)

Say: “I have no power over any benefit or harm to myself except as God wills. If I had the knowledge of the Unseen, I should increase good for myself and no evil should have touched me. I am only a warner and a bringer of glad tidings unto people who believe.” (7:188)

Does this mean that no one can obtain even a small part of this knowledge? To answer this question, we should consider the following points:

- Whatever we have (e.g., health, knowledge, and power) essentially belongs to God and is, accordingly, from God. We have no power except that which He has given us, and no knowledge except that which He has taught us or enabled us to learn. We see and hear because He makes this possible. This being so, the verses do not exclude people absolutely from acquiring some of this knowledge, but only if He allows this.
- The concept of the Unseen relates to the future and the past. The Qur'an presents the stories of past nations as stories of the Unseen. Historical research informs us of the past.
- Many people can, by God's Will, glimpse part of the future in dreams or other ways that are beyond the scope of this book.
- The Qur'an, like the universe and humanity, is an organic entity, for each verse is interrelated with the others. Thus the first and foremost interpreter of the Qur'an is the Qur'an itself. This means that a complete and true understanding of a verse depends on understanding all other relevant verses. It is a creedal principle and explicitly declared that knowledge of the Unseen, like power, seeing, and hearing, belongs to God. However, He reveals some of this knowledge to a Messenger whom He has chosen:

[God alone is] the knower of the Unseen and He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, except a Messenger whom He has chosen (72:26-27).

God revealed many secrets to His Messenger, who then related to his people those that they needed to know. The

number his predictions reported in authentic books of Tradition exceed 300, and fall into three categories: his own time, events after his death, and miraculous explanations that can be understood only in conjunction with scientific developments.

HIS OWN TIME

- As reported by authentic books of Tradition, including *Sahih al-Bukhari*, one day God's Messenger mounted the pulpit, preached, and then told the congregation to ask him whatever they wished to. They did so. Finally, a young man named 'Abd Allah stood up and asked who his father was. Since illicit intercourse was widespread in pre-Islamic times, this young man was attributed to someone other than Hudafa al-Sahmi, whom he called father. God's Messenger told him his father was Hudafa al-Sahmi. Freed from groundless accusations, 'Abd Allah was relieved and thereafter was called 'Abd Allah ibn Hudafa al-Sahmi.

People continued to ask questions until, eventually, 'Umar, noticing the anger of God's Messenger,⁶⁰ stood up and said: "We are pleased with God as our Lord, with Islam as our religion, and with Muhammad as our Messenger." This eased the Prophet and he came down from the pulpit.⁶¹ This event took place before all the Companions, and no one was reported to contradict what he said.

⁶⁰ It is not stated exactly why the Prophet was angry. However, we can make several guesses: Some questions may have contained unbecoming things or sounded unnecessary, or he might have seen some doubts in their hearts about his knowledge and so wanted to lay them to rest.

⁶¹ *Bukhari*, "Fitan," 15.

- ‘Umar reports in a narration recorded in *Sahih al-Muslim*: Before the Battle of Badr started, God’s Messenger walked around the battlefield and pointed to some locations, saying: “Abu Jahl will be killed here, ‘Utba here, Shayba here, Walid here, and so on.” By God, after the battle we found their corpses in those exact places.⁶²
- Ahmad ibn Hanbal reports: One day, God’s Messenger was sitting in the mosque with his Companions. He told them: “In a few minutes, a man with a shining face will come. He is one of the best people of Yemen, and has on his forehead an angel’s handprint.” After a short while the man came and, kneeling before God’s Messenger proclaimed his conversion. He was Jarir ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bajali.⁶³
- In his *Dala’il al-Nubuwwah*, Bayhaqi narrates: Abu Sufyan accepted Islam during the conquest of Makka, but belief had not yet been established firmly in his heart. While God’s Messenger was circumambulating the Ka’ba, it occurred to him: “I wonder what would happen if I formed a new army to confront this man once more.” No sooner had he thought this than God’s Messenger approached him and said: “If you do, God will defeat you again.”⁶⁴ This strengthened Abu Sufyan’s belief, and he begged God’s forgiveness. He finally understood that the Messenger was taught by God, the All-Knowing.
- As related in the reliable books of Tradition, ‘Umayr ibn Wahb, known as a “diabolic man” before his conversion, conspired with Safwan ibn Umayya to assassinate God’s

⁶² *Muslim*, “Janna,” 76, 77.

⁶³ *Ibn Hanbal*, 4:360-64.

⁶⁴ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 4:348; Bayhaqi, *Dala’il al-Nubuwwa*, 5:102.

Messenger. He went to Madina for this purpose and pretended to be a Muslim. He was taken to the mosque. However, since the Companions had no trust in him, they formed a protective circle around God's Messenger. The Messenger asked 'Umayr why he had come to Madina. All of 'Umayr's lies could not convince God's Messenger, who finally told him: "As you are not telling the truth, I will tell it. You conspired with Safwan to kill me in return for 100 camels." Shocked by the truth of this answer, 'Umayr held the Prophet's hands tightly in awe and amazement and became a Muslim. He became so deeply committed to Islam that he came to be called "a most ascetic devotee of Islam."⁶⁵

THE FUTURE

The reliable books of Tradition contain approximately 300 such predictions, among them the following:

- Bukhari and Muslim report from Usama that: One day I was with God's Messenger on the roof of a tall building in Madina. Looking around, he said: "I see seditious events and internal conflicts pouring down like raindrops among your houses."⁶⁶

'Umar was very afraid that disorder and sedition might appear in the Muslim community. One day during his caliphate, he asked Hudhayfa ibn al-Yaman, to whom God's Messenger had disclosed many secret things, including future events and who the Hypocrites were, about them. Hudhayfa responded: "They have nothing to do with you, 'Umar. There is a gate between you and them." 'Umar asked if the gate would be opened or broken

⁶⁵ Ibn Hajar, *Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz al-Sahaba*, 3:36.

⁶⁶ Bukhari, "Fada'il al-Madina," 8; Muslim, "Fitan," 9.

down. When Hudhayfa replied it would be broken down, a shocked 'Umar exclaimed: "Then this gate will never be closed again!" 'Umar was the gate between the Muslim community and sedition.⁶⁷ After he was stabbed by a treacherous Persian slave, Muslim unity received a fatal blow. Since that day, the Muslim world has suffered discord and sedition.

- Bukhari and Abu Dawud quote Habbab ibn Arat, who said: "During the days of trouble and torture in Makka, I went to God's Messenger while he was sitting in the shade of the Ka'ba. I was still a slave then, and the Makkans tortured me severely. Unable to endure it any longer, I asked him to pray to God for help and salvation. But he faced me and said:

By God, previous communities endured much more than this. Some people were forced to lie in ditches and then sawed in half. This did not make them forsake their faith. They were skinned alive, but never became weak against the enemy. God will perfect this religion, but you are impatient. A day will come when a woman will travel alone by herself from San'a to Hadramawt fearing nothing but wild beasts. However, you show impatience.

Habbab concluded: "By God, what God's Messenger predicted that day has all come true. I have personally witnessed it all."⁶⁸

- During his last illness, God's Messenger called his daughter Fatima to his bedside. He whispered something to her, and she burst into tears. He called her again and whispered something else to her. This time she displayed great

⁶⁷ Bukhari, "Sawm," 3; Muslim, "Fitan," 27.

⁶⁸ Bukhari, "Manaqib," 22; Abu Dawud, "Jihad," 97.

joy. 'A'isha saw this and asked Fatima about it. At first, Fatima said: "This is a secret belonging to God's Messenger." But after the Prophet's death, Fatima told her: "The first time he said he would die of that illness, which made me weep bitterly. Then he told that I would be his first family member to join him after his death, and this made me very happy."⁶⁹ The Prophet died of that illness, and Fatima joined him in death 6 months later.⁷⁰

- As related in most of the six authentic books of Tradition, one day on the pulpit God's Messenger took his grandson Hasan into his arms and declared: "This son of mine is a noble one. It is hoped that God will reconcile through him two large hosts of Muslims."⁷¹ Hasan was indeed a noble person. About 35 years after this prediction, he renounced the caliphate in favor of Mu'awiya, thus demonstrating the truthfulness of his noble grandfather.
- One day the Messenger put his hand on 'Abd Allah ibn Busr's head and said: "This boy will live 100 years, and those warts on his face will disappear."⁷² 'Abd Allah lived for 100 years and died without warts on his face.

⁶⁹ *Ibn Maja*, "Jana'iz," 65; *Muslim*, "Fada'il al-Sahaba," 15; *Ibn Hanbal*, 3:197.

⁷⁰ The death of God's Messenger touched Fatima so deeply that she gave voice to her grief in the following verses:

What else does the one who has smelt the soil of
Muhammad's tomb need?

Does one really need the smell of anything else?

I have been struck by such misfortunes that if they
had fallen upon days,

They would have changed into nights!

⁷¹ *Bukhari*, "Sulh," 9; *Ibn Hanbal*, 5:49.

⁷² Haythami, *Al-Majma' al-Zawa'id*, 9:404-5.

- As recorded in almost all books of Tradition and the Prophet's biography, the Muslims dug a ditch around Madina during the Battle of Khandaq (the Ditch). The Prophet shared in this work and, to reinforce his Companions morale, occasionally prayed for them: "O God, the true life is the life of the Hereafter, so forgive the Helpers and the Emigrants."⁷³ His Companions would reply enthusiastically: "O God, had it not been for Your help and grace, we could not have found the Straight Path, paid alms, or prayed. And so, send down upon us serenity, and make our steps firm if we encounter the enemy!"⁷⁴

While digging, a huge rock was uncovered. The Companions could not remove it, and so called God's Messenger. He came with a lever and pickaxe, and set out to smash it. Each blow produced a spark and, through God's inspiration, he predicted a future conquest, saying: "I have been given the keys of Byzantium; I have been given the keys of Persia; I have been given the keys of Yemen,"⁷⁵ and so on. Within 20 years, Persia and many parts of Byzantium belonged to the Muslims, thanks to the brilliant military leadership of Khalid ibn Walid and Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas. Byzantium was conquered later by the Ottoman ruler Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror.

- 'Adiy ibn Khatam reports: One day people complained, in the presence of God's Messenger, about poverty, deprivation, and unsafe desert roads. He replied: "A day will come when a woman will travel alone on her camel from

⁷³ *Bukhari*, "Manaqib al-Ansar," 39; *Muslim*, "Jihad," 127.

⁷⁴ *Bukhari*, "Maghazi," 29; *Muslim*, "Jihad," 123, 124, 125.

⁷⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 4:116; *Ibn Hanbal*, 4:303; Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 3:230.

Hira to the Ka'ba with fear of nothing but God alone. A day will come and the treasures of Chosrocs (the Persian ruler) will be distributed among you. A day will come when people will travel around to find someone to pay the prescribed alms to, but in vain." When he predicted this, members of the Tayy tribe used to attack travelers, and the Persian Empire was enjoying its most splendid days. But I personally witnessed the first two predictions come true, and I am expecting the third also will prove to be true.⁷⁶

'Adiy did not live long enough to see the third prediction come true. However, soon after his death, during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, people became so rich that no one could be found to give the prescribed alms to in the vast lands of the Muslim state. Living standards were very high, and there was no discernible imbalance in the distribution of wealth.

- While the Prophet's Mosque was being built in Madina, everybody, including God's Messenger, worked to complete it as quickly as possible. Some cast sun-dried bricks, and others carried them to construction site. Meanwhile, 'Ammar ibn Yasir, one of the first Muslims, approached God's Messenger and, probably to attract his love and affection, said: "O God's Messenger, they loaded on me two sun-dried bricks." God's Messenger smiled and, while rubbing the dust off 'Ammar's face, said he would be martyred: "What a pity (Glad tidings for you, according to another version), O 'Ammar, a rebellious group will kill you."⁷⁷ 'Ammar was martyred about 40 years later at the Battle of Siffin by Mu'awiya's followers.

⁷⁶ Bukhari, "Manaqib," 22.

⁷⁷ Bukhari, "Salat," 63; Muslim, "Fitna," 70, 72, 73; Ibn Hanbal, 12: 161, 164.

- God's Messenger was distributing the spoils of a war when a man with Mongol features told him to be just in distribution. To this impertinence, God's Messenger asked: "Who else will show justice if I am not just? If I do not show justice, then I have been lost and brought to naught." According to another version, he said: "If I am not just, then, (by following me) you (the people) have been lost and brought to naught."⁷⁸

'Umar was furious with this man, and demanded that God's Messenger allow him to "cut off this hypocrite's head." But the Messenger only said: "In the future, a group of people with chubby faces, slanting eyes, and flat noses [like this man] will appear. They will recite so much of the Qur'an that, when compared to their recitation, yours will seem small to you. Nevertheless, what they recite will not have the slightest effect on them. They will leave the religion like an arrow shot from a bow. There will, moreover, be a large fatty growth on the arm of one of them."⁷⁹

Years passed, and a group called the Kharijites appeared. Bearing these very characteristics, and basing themselves on a mistaken interpretation of the Qur'an, they rebelled. Caliph 'Ali met and defeated them at Nahrawan. A corpse with a fatty growth on its arm was taken to 'Ali. This event, besides proving the truthfulness and Messengership of Prophet Muhammad, fulfilled another prediction: "O 'Ali, I have fought for the descent of the Qur'an; you will fight against its misinterpretation."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Bukhari, "Adab," 95; Muslim, "Zakat," 142; Ibn Hanbal, 3:56.

⁷⁹ Bukhari, "Adab," 95; Muslim, "Zakat," 142; Ibn Hanbal, 1:356.

⁸⁰ Ibn Hanbal, 3:82.

- One day God's Messenger slept in the house of Umm Haram, his foster aunt. He woke up smiling. Umm Haram asked why he was happy, and he answered: "I dreamed that like kings seated on thrones, a group of Muslims boarded ships and went off to war." Umm Haram asked him to pray that she would be included in this group. He did so, and said: "You will be among them."⁸¹ Years passed. During Mu'awiya's caliphate, Muslims waged war upon Cyprus. Umm Haram was in the army accompanying her husband, 'Ubada ibn Samit. She died there, and her tomb has been visited ever since.

THE DISTANT FUTURE

- Once God's Messenger declared: "When the end of time [the Last Day] approaches, the children of Kantura will appear. They will be slant-eyed, chubby-faced, and flat-nosed."⁸² This description fits the Mongols, and some of the Kharijites, to whom it is traditionally thought to refer. God's Messenger predicted both the Mongol invasion and the destruction of the Muslim world, and the Western massacre of Andalusia's Muslims—two of the most tragic calamities to afflict the Muslim nation. Always concerned with his people's fate, he used such predictions to warn Muslims that deviating from the Straight Path will bring calamity. God uses wrongdoers and oppressors to chasten and correct His believing servants, and afterward turns against the oppressors and eradicates them.
- God's Messenger foresaw the conquest of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul): "Certainly, Constantinople will be

⁸¹ Bukhari, "Jihad," 3:8; *Muslim*, "'Imara," 160-61.

⁸² Bukhari, "Jihad," 95, 96; *Abu Dawud*, "Malahim," 10; *Ibn Maja*, "Fitān," 36; *Ibn Hanbal*, 5:40, 45.

conquered. How good is the commander who will conquer it, and how good his army!"⁸³ Hoping to be the object of the Prophet's praise, Muslim rulers and commanders from the time of Mu'awiya sought to conquer this city. During one campaign, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, the noble Companion, was martyred and buried near the city walls.

Constantinople finally was conquered by the Ottoman ruler Mehmed the Conqueror. Besides this great commander and statesman, his two school friends Hasan of Ulubat and Qadi Khidr Calabi, as well as his tutor Ak Shamsaddin, were also symbols of this conquest. One was in the army, and the others were in the departments of religious and scientific education. The prayer and praise of God's Messenger encompasses all of them.

- God's Messenger predicted and explained the principle reasons for the Ottoman State's destruction and condition of the Muslim world after the First World War: "Nations will call each other, as people make invitations to a meal, to make a concerted attack on you." Someone asked: "Will this happen because there are only a few of us?" God's Messenger answered: "No, your numbers will be vast, but you will be as powerless as wood-chips or straw carried in a flood. God will remove your enemies' fear of you and implant within you a fear of death and a love of the world."⁸⁴

The prediction, which became reality during the First World War, also describes our current situation. We are divided into many factions, while our enemies seek clos-

⁸³ Hakim, *Mustadrak*, 4:422; *Ibn Hanbal*, 4:335.

⁸⁴ *Abu Dawud*, "Malahim," 5; *Ibn Hanbal*, 5:278.

er unity based on mutual interests. In the past, they were afraid of us because we saw the grave as a bridal chamber, something to look forward to. But now, we are so attached to this world that we do all we can to escape death, even though we know this is impossible. We also have been the object of many betrayals. ‘Uthman and ‘Ali were victims of treachery, and the magnificent Ottoman State was made sacrificial food for the carnivorous peoples of the world. It experienced uncountable betrayals by nations who had been so prosperous and peaceful under Ottoman rule.

- God’s Messenger predicted the rise of communism in a *hadith* reported by Ibn ‘Umar. Facing toward the east, he said: “Take care! Anarchy and subversion will appear from that direction, from where the Age of Satan will begin.”⁸⁵ The Age of Satan, built upon atheism and hedonism, is the opposite of the Age of the Prophet, based on belief in and devotion to God. Communism, the unlawful outcome of capitalism, champions hostility to religion, piety, and all moral and traditional values. In another *hadith*, God’s Messenger foretold that communism would arise as “a red wind.”
- God’s Messenger once declared: “The Euphrates will probably go dry, uncovering a treasure (a mountain, in another version) of gold beneath it. Whoever of you witnesses it, should refrain from taking any of it.”⁸⁶ This *hadith* alludes to the great war expected to take place along the Euphrates. Although this river has seen many

⁸⁵ *Bukhari*, “Fitan,” 16; *Muslim*, “Fitan,” 45; *Ibn Hanbal*, 2:50, 72.

⁸⁶ *Bukhari*, “Fitan,” 24; *Muslim*, “Fitan,” 30; *Abu Dawud*, “Malahim,” 12:13.

wars, among them the Iran–Iraq war, this *hadith* points to a much greater spasm of violence in the future. While we can take the *hadith* literally, we also can take it figuratively. For example, oil is known as “black gold.” Or, maybe the water itself will become as valuable as gold and cause regional or even international wars. Maybe the income obtained from the dams on this river will attract international attention and cause great wars. In whichever case, God’s Messenger warned that the Euphrates region is like dynamite at the heart of the Muslim world.

- God’s Messenger averred that Christianity would be purified of its borrowed, pagan elements and join Islam, thus strengthening the Divine religion.⁸⁷ This will be a universal turning point in human history, and the believers, at a time when they are gripped by their enemies, will defeat and destroy the global representatives of unbelief.
- God’s Messenger predicted that agricultural reform and developments in science and technology would enable farmers to produce a pomegranate that, on an individual bases, will be enough for twenty people, and that its rind will provide shade for people. He also prophesied that wheat produced in area the size of a house balcony will be enough to feed a family for a year.⁸⁸ With the advent of biotechnology and genetic manipulation, such wonders are probably not too far in the future.
- In another Tradition, God’s Messenger describes the end of time: “Prior to Doomsday, people will discriminate when greeting others (preferring to greet only some),

⁸⁷ *Muslim*, “Iman,” 244–47.

⁸⁸ *Muslim*, “Fitan,” 110; *Tirmidhi*, “Fitan,” 59; *Ibn Hanbal*, 4:182.

trade will be given so much currency and preference that a wife will help her husband in it, parents and relatives will no longer be visited, false evidence and false testimony will replace the truth, and writing will gain prominence.”⁸⁹

All of this has come true. Today, trade is the most preferred way of making a livelihood, and women are exploited to advertise various products and services, and to attract customers. The rights of parents and relatives are no longer considered and, once they become old and most need attention and affection, they are often placed in old people's homes or nursing homes. The power of the modern press is unquestionable, and lying is now so widespread that few people can resist it. This is true at all levels, from business lies to false testimony in law suits.

- In a *hadith qudsi*, the Prophet relates from God: “At the end of time I will cause knowledge to be obtained by everyone, men and women, slave and free, and old and young.”⁹⁰ Education is now open to almost everyone through schools, universities, and the media. Many intellectuals and scientists say that the next age will be the Age of Information.
- In another authentic Tradition, God's Messenger declares: “The Last Day will not come until the Qur'an is a means of shame and Islam is left without a powerful group to support it.”⁹¹ We have seen the truth of this prediction. For nearly a century, Muslims have been persecuted even in their own lands. While atheists and unbelievers have

⁸⁹ *Ibn Hanbal*, 1:407, 408; *Hakim, Mustadrak*, 4:98, 448.

⁹⁰ *Darimi, Muqaddima*, 27.

⁹¹ *Hindi, Kanz al-'Ummal*, 14:244.

openly declared their unbelief everywhere, Islam has been the target of verbal, written, and even physical assault. Muslims have felt compelled to conceal their belief, and have become too ashamed to openly declare their belief.

- The Messenger predicted the developments in telecommunication and transportation. The above *hadith* continues: "The Hour will not come until the distances of time and space diminish." I have translated the word *taqarub* as "diminish."⁹² It means "to approach each other" and implies that before the Day of Judgment, things which previously took a long time will be possible in a very short time.

This *hadith*, in addition to predicting modern methods of transportation and telecommunication, implies that time is relative. The Earth is gradually taking an elliptical shape. This may cause some changes in the division and calculation of time. As for the relativity of time alluded to in the *hadith*, we know that time differs in some aspects (e.g., division, length, calculation, and the speed of its passage in or around every sphere or planet). If humanity manages to leave this solar system, the present conception of time will completely change. Thus, in a single word, God's Messenger makes several predictions, some of which have already come true, and also alludes to several scientific facts.

- God's Messenger also predicted: "A time will come upon people when almost everyone will eat from usury, to the extent that those who refrain from it will be exposed to its 'dust'."⁹³ God's Messenger points to two important facts:

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ *Ibn Maja*, "Tijara," 58; *Ibn Hanbal*, 2:494; *Nasa'i*, "Buyu'," 2.

- A time will come when all formal transactions will involve interest. No one will be able to avoid it completely. However, those who do not enter into interest-based transactions will not be held accountable for the interest they eat unintentionally, as long as they do their best to refrain from usury.
- God's Messenger may have meant by being exposed to its dust that a capitalist class would emerge and increase its wealth through interest. This would gradually lead the working class into deeper and deeper poverty, which would result in direct and bitter class warfare.

All these predictions have come true. How tragic it is that Muslim countries are in such a despised, degenerate state because, among other things, they are drowning in a swamp of interest despite the Qur'anic warning that anyone involved in interest-based transactions is *at war with God and His Messenger* (2:279). If only Muslims had been conscious of such Qur'anic statements, they would not be in such a miserable position.

- In the following authentic Tradition, God's Messenger points to another aspect of the present sad state of the Muslim world: "A time will come when believers conceal themselves as hypocrites do among you today."⁹⁴ At the time of the Prophet, hypocrites used to conceal themselves by going through the outward motions of the religious rituals. According to this *hadith*, Muslims will try to conceal themselves, even performing their religious obligations in secret. The same state was described in another *hadith*: "Sedition and deviation will occur. A Muslim will be disgraced for performing the prescribed prayers, just as a woman is disgraced today because of fornication."

⁹⁴ Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummal*, 11:176.

- In another narration, God's Messenger predicted that oil would be discovered in Taleqan (Iran): "Good tidings to Taleqan, for God's treasures are there, but not of gold and silver."⁹⁵ In the past, treasury meant gold and silver. For this reason, God's Messenger emphasized that Taleqan's treasures would be something else. What comes to mind first today when told of such a treasury is oil. However, he might have implied resources of uranium or diamonds. If this is the case, the prediction has come true, for such resources have been discovered in and around Taleqan.
- "You will walk in the footsteps of those who preceded you so closely that if, for example, they put their heads in a lizard's hole, you would do the same." The Companions asked him if *those who preceded* you meant the Jews and Christians, and he answered: "Who else could it be?"⁹⁶ Muslims have been suffering from an identity crisis for two centuries. They are blind imitators of the West and have been caught up in vices that destroyed all previous civilizations.

SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENTS

God's Messenger also made many predictions concerning various scientific developments, some of which have already come true. Out of the many examples, I will cite only a few to illustrate his accuracy in this regard.

- As related by Bukhari, God's Messenger declared: "God did not send down an illness for which He did not send a cure."⁹⁷ This *hadith*, in addition to declaring that every ill-

⁹⁵ Ibid., 14:591.

⁹⁶ *Muslim*, "'Ilm," 6; *Bukhari*, "Anbiya'," 50.

⁹⁷ *Bukhari*, "Tib," 1.

ness is curable, is the most comprehensive statement encouraging medical research. In another Tradition, the Messenger states that "there is a cure for every illness."⁹⁸

Another version tells us: "Do not neglect to treat your diseases, for God does not send a disease for which He does not also send a cure. The only exception is old age."⁹⁹

Humanity may discover a cure for every illness, but will never be able to stop our journey from the world of spirits to the material world and then on to either Paradise or Hell through the stations of embryo, infancy, childhood, youth, old age, the grave, and the Resurrection. The Prophet encourages us to learn how to cure illnesses, but also warns us not to neglect preparing for the next world.

God encourages us to pursue scientific knowledge by relating the miracles of earlier Prophets. This brings such matters to the scientists' attention and thereby shows the limits to their aspirations. By allowing Jesus the inimitable miracle of bringing the dead back to life, He points out that we can cure everything but death.

The story of Moses' staff shows us that we can use inanimate things for various purposes, such as obtaining water from deep underground by using such simple things as a staff like a centrifuge. However, we will never cause a rock to bring forth abundant water by striking it with a staff, or to change a staff into a snake, both of which Moses did.

The Qur'an is Prophet Muhammad's greatest miracle, and marks the farthest limit in literary style and eloquence that humanity can attain. It also implies that writing and

⁹⁸ *Abu Dawud*, "Tib," 10; *Muslim*, "Salam," 69.

⁹⁹ *Tirmidhi*, "Tib," 2; *Ibn Maja*, "Tib," 1; *Ibn Hanbal*, 4:278.

eloquence will have the greatest importance toward the end of time. The Prophets set examples and showed us the limits to which we may go in material as well as spiritual progress.

- The Messenger advised quarantine to contain outbreaks of contagious diseases: “If you hear that there is pestilence in a place, don’t enter it; if pestilence breaks out where you are, don’t leave it to escape the pestilence.”¹⁰⁰ According to Ahmad ibn Hanbal, he also declared: “Keep away from the leper as you do from a lion.”¹⁰¹ In this *hadith*, God’s Messenger advises us to protect ourselves against leprosy. Quarantine is again suggested here as a way to prevent the spread of leprosy.
- Imam Muslim narrates in his *Sahih* that God’s Messenger declared: “If a dog licks your bowl, clean it seven times, first time with soil, and the other six with water.”¹⁰² This *hadith* contains the following medical principles related to bacteria:
 - Dogs may carry microbes of certain diseases that can be passed to people. This fact was discovered recently by scientists.
 - A dog’s saliva and excrement may contain substances that can damage a person’s health.
 - At the time of the Prophet, disinfection and sterilization were unknown. Nevertheless, God’s Messenger recommends that a bowl licked by a dog be cleaned with soil. Today we know that soil is a good antiseptic that contains such substances as tetracycline.

¹⁰⁰ Bukhari, “Tib,” 30; Muslim, “Salam,” 98.

¹⁰¹ Bukhari, “Tib,” 19; Ibn Hanbal, 2:443.

¹⁰² Muslim, “Tahara,” 91.

In another *hadith* concerning dogs, God's Messenger expresses a fundamental principle of ecology: "If dogs were not a separate community, I would order their killing."¹⁰³ This implies that every species is an indispensable element of ecological balance.

- As recorded by *Sahih al-Tirmidhi* and *Sunan Abu Dawud*, God's Messenger declares: "The blessings of food lie in washing hands before and after eating."¹⁰⁴ This *hadith* emphasizes the importance of cleanliness. As we use our hands, germs accumulate and can be removed only by washing them. In another *hadith*, he advises us to wash our hands after we wake up since "You do not know where your hands have moved while you sleep."¹⁰⁵ At that time, no one knew about microbes.
- As recorded in all six of the most authentic books of Tradition from as many as 40 Companions, God's Messenger established the principle of dental care: "If it didn't burden upon community excessively, I would command them to clean their teeth with *miswak* [a tooth stick] before each of the five daily prayers."¹⁰⁶ Dental hygiene is of great significance not just for our teeth, but for our entire body. God's Messenger followed this practice, and so we should do likewise.
- In relation to health and digestion, God's Messenger recommended: "In eating, apportion a third of your stomach

¹⁰³ *Abu Dawud*, "Adahi," 21; *Ibn Maja*, "Sayd," 2; *Ibn Hanbal*, 4:85.

¹⁰⁴ *Abu Dawud*, "At'ima," 11; *Tirmidhi*, "At'ima," 39; *Ibn Hanbal*, 5:441.

¹⁰⁵ *Muslim*, "Tahara," 87; *Abu Dawud*, "Tahara," 49; *Tirmidhi*, "Tahara," 19.

¹⁰⁶ *Bukhari*, "Jumu'a," 8; *Muslim*, "Tahara," 42; *Abu Dawud*, "Tahara," 25; *Tirmidhi*, "Tahara," 18; *Nasa'i*, "Tahara," 6; *Ibn Maja*, "Tahara," 7; *Ibn Hanbal*, 1:80.

to food, another third to water, and leave the last third empty. The bowl most distasteful to God is a full stomach.”¹⁰⁷ In another similar *hadith*, he said: “What I fear concerning my community is a large stomach, oversleep, idleness, and the lack of certainty.”¹⁰⁸

All of the points mentioned here are either antecedent to or a result of the other. Those who are idle and heedless, who ignore self-control and self-criticism, are apt to become fat. This causes them to eat more food. A full stomach encourages more sleep, and the person begins to sleep for longer periods of time. Such people, now addicted to overeating and excessive sleeping, will never be able to acquire certainty and deep conviction in Islam. This is the case with most people today.

- Another Tradition concerning health is as follows: “Treat your eyes with kohl, for it nourishes the eyes and eyelashes.”¹⁰⁹ Many medical authorities state that kohl does exactly that. Another substance, recommended by the Prophet and useful for health as an antibiotic and for its dermatological effect, is henna.¹¹⁰ Henna is better and more effective as an antiseptic and sterilization agent than such substances as a tincture of iodine.
- Bukhari relates from Abu Hurayra that once God’s Messenger said: “A black cumin seed contains a cure for every illness but death.”¹¹¹ This *hadith* contains many

¹⁰⁷ *Tirmidhi*, “Zuhd,” 47; *Ibn Haubal*, 4:132.

¹⁰⁸ Hindi, *Kanz al-‘Ummal*, 3:460.

¹⁰⁹ *Abu Dawud*, “Tib,” 14; *Tirmidhi*, “Tib,” 9.

¹¹⁰ *Ibn Maja*, “Tib,” 29; *Tirmidhi*, “Tib,” 13.

¹¹¹ *Bukhari*, “Tib,” 7; *Muslim*, “Salam,” 88.

truths related to therapy. A patient needs, particularly during convalescence, foods that are rich in proteins, calories, and vitamins, and that are easily digestible. Scientific investigations have recently shown that all these properties are found in black cumin.

- Bukhari relates from God's Messenger: "When a fly falls into your bowl, dip it completely in the food before taking it out. There is disease in one of the fly's wings, and cure in the other."¹¹² No one at that time knew that flies carry microbes. Moreover, when a fly drops into a bowl, it tries to hold one of its wings off the food so that it can take off again. Thus, it leaves bacteria on the food. But when it is submerged with a slight touch, the tiny bag on the other wing bursts and scatters the anti-bacteria to kill the germs already left. This is a very recent medical discovery.
- 'A'isha related that once Fatima bint Abu Khubash asked God's Messenger: "O God's Messenger, my blood does not stop. Should I abandon the prescribed prayers?" He replied: "No, you must not, for it is not menstrual blood but rather a haemorrhage."¹¹³ Except by Prophethood, how could he have distinguished between a normal haemorrhage and menstrual blood? How could he have known that menstrual bleeding is a kind of haemorrhage?
- Tariq ibn Suwayd narrates: I used to suffer from an illness, and took alcohol as a remedy. When alcohol was banned, I asked God's Messenger whether I could continue using this remedy. He told me: "No, for it is not a remedy; rather, it is the disease itself."¹¹⁴ Scientists now agree

¹¹² *Bukhari*, "Bad'u al-Khalq," 17; *Tib*, 58; *Abu Dawud*, "At'ima," 48.

¹¹³ *Bukhari*, "Wudu'," 63; *Muslim*, "Hayd," 62; *Abu Dawud*, "Tahara," 109.

¹¹⁴ *Muslim*, "Ashriba," 12; *Ibn Maja*, "Tib," 27.

that even a single drop of alcohol is harmful to one's physical and spiritual health.

- God's Messenger proclaimed that ten things are intrinsically necessary for men and therefore ordered by Prophets. Circumcision is one of them.¹¹⁵ Today, scientists admit that a man's foreskin is exposed and susceptible to infections, even cancer. Therefore, millions of people are circumcised in Europe and America.

We are convinced that the West will one day acknowledge the truth of Islam, and that the prediction made at the beginning of the twentieth century by Said Nursi will come true: "The Ottoman State is pregnant with a Western one, as the West is with an Islamic one. Both will give birth to what they are pregnant with."¹¹⁶

We have so far explained the truthfulness of Prophets, emphasizing the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad. As mentioned, all predictions made by a Prophet eventually come true, for they never lie. They came to guide us to the Straight Path and to lead us to Paradise. Had they lied even once, they would have guided no one to the truth. However, their truthfulness, especially that of Prophet Muhammad, will be as clear as the sun in the Hereafter, where people will see everything as it is. There, all the tidings they gave about the next life, the Resurrection, the Place of Gathering, the Final Reckoning, the Bridge, Paradise, and Hell will be realized.

Trustworthiness

The second attribute of Prophethood is *amana*, an Arabic word meaning *trustworthiness* and derived from the same

¹¹⁵ *Muslim*, "Tahara," 49; *Abu Dawud*, "Tahara," 27.

¹¹⁶ Said Nursi, *Tarihce Hayat* (Biography), 56.

root as *mu'min* (believer). Being a believer implies being a trustworthy person. All Prophets were the best believers and therefore perfect exemplars of trustworthiness. To stress this principle, God summarizes the stories of five Prophets using the same words:

The people of Noah denied the Messengers. When their brother Noah asked them: "Will you not fear God and avoid evil? I am a trustworthy Messenger to you." (26:105-7)

Replace the name Noah with those of Hud, Lut, Shu'ayb, and Salih, and you have a summarized version of these five Prophets' trustworthiness.

Mu'min is also a Divine Name, for God is the ultimate *Mu'min*, the source of security and reliability. We put our trust in, confide in, and rely upon Him. He distinguished the Prophets by their trustworthiness, and our connection to Him through the Prophets is based entirely on their trustworthiness and reliability.

Trustworthiness is also an essential quality of Archangel Gabriel. The Qur'an describes Gabriel as *one obeyed and trustworthy* (81:21). We received the Qur'an through two trustworthy Messengers: Gabriel and Prophet Muhammad. The former conveyed it; the latter related it to us.

The trustworthiness of God's Messenger. Prophet Muhammad was completely trustworthy toward all of God's creatures. He was loyal and never cheated anyone.

God chose the Messenger for his trustworthiness so that he would devote himself totally to delivering the Message truthfully. He was so concerned about his duty that he would repeat the verses while Gabriel was reciting them to him. God finally revealed:

Move not your tongue concerning (the Qur'an) to make haste therewith. It is for Us to collect it, to establish it in your heart and enable you to recite it. So, when We have recited it to you, follow its recital. Then it is also for Us to make it clear to you. (75:16-19)

As the Qur'an was given to him as a trust, he conveyed it to people in the best way possible. He dedicated his life to this sacred cause, constantly aware of his responsibility. In the last year of his life, when he was delivering the Farewell Pilgrimage's sermon at Mount 'Arafat, he reiterated the Commandments of God once more. At the end of each sentence, he told the people: "In the near future, they will ask you about me." He then would ask them if he had conveyed the Message to them, to which they responded, each time, with great enthusiasm: "Yes, you have conveyed it!" He then would call upon God to witness their words.¹¹⁷

Specific events demonstrating the Messenger's trustworthiness. God's Messenger never thought of concealing even a word of the Qur'an. In fact, we read in the Qur'an several mild Divine admonitions for a few actions of his. If he wrote it, as some mistakenly claim, why would he have included such verses?

The Prophet was raised in a primitive society characterized by customs that contradicted reason as well as sociological and scientific facts. For example, as adopted children enjoyed the same legal status as natural children, a man could not legally marry his adopted son's widow or ex-wife. This practice was abolished, for adoption does not create a relationship comparable to that with one's biological parents. God solved this problem, as always, through the Messenger's

¹¹⁷ *Abu Dawud*, "Manasik," 56; *Ibn Maja*, "Manasik," 84; *Ibn Kathir*, *Al-Bidaya*, 5:173.

life in order to separate a legal fiction from a natural reality, and to establish a new law and custom.

Zayd, an emancipated black slave and servant of God's Messenger, was also his adopted son. At the Prophet's request, Zayd married Zaynab bint Jahsh. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that the marriage would not last long. Admitting that he was spiritually and intellectually inferior to his wife, Zayd thought it would be better for him to divorce her. In the end, the Qur'an commanded Muhammad to marry her: *We gave her in marriage to you* (33:37).

Of course, doing so would violate a strong social taboo. As such, and because the Hypocrites would use this to defame him, he delayed announcing the Divine decree. God admonished him as follows:

Then you said to him on whom God bestowed grace and unto whom you had shown favor: "Keep your wife to yourself and fear God." But you hid in your heart that which God was about to make manifest because you feared the people [would slander you], whereas God had a better right that you should fear him (33:37).

'A'isha later commented: "If God's Messenger could have concealed any Revelation, he would have concealed that verse."¹¹⁸

If Muhammad had not been trustworthy, he would have done just that. However, such an act is contrary to his character and mission, and would mean that he had not delivered the Message. Furthermore, God prohibits him from doing this:

O Messenger, deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord; for if you do not, you will not have

¹¹⁸ Bukhari, "Tawhid," 22; Muslim, "Iman," 288.

fulfilled your task of His Messengership. God will protect you from men. God does not guide the unbelievers.
(5:67)

So, God's Messenger passed on whatever was revealed to Him.

His relations with others. God's Messenger was trustworthy and encouraged others to follow his example. Once during the last ten days of Ramadan, his wife Safiyya visited him while he was keeping vigil in the mosque. As he was escorting her home, two Companions happened to pass by. The Messenger stopped them and, unveiling his wife's face, said: "This is my wife Safiyya." They said: "God forbid any evil thought about you, O Messenger of God." The Messenger was warning them against having evil thoughts about him, for that could cause them to lose their faith and enter Hell. He gave them and us a lesson, saying: "Satan continuously circulates within people's blood vessels."¹¹⁹

God's Messenger was an embodiment of trustworthiness. His own people, even before his Prophethood, called him *al-Amin* (the Trustworthy One). After his declaration, his enemies continued to entrust him with their precious goods.

He warned his people against lying, breaking their word, and breaching their trust. All of these were condemned as "signs of hypocrisy."¹²⁰ He was so meticulous in this matter that when he saw a woman call her child, saying: "Come on, I'll give you something," he asked her if she was telling the truth. She replied that she would give him a date, to which God's Messenger responded: "If you don't give him something, you are a liar."

¹¹⁹ Bukhari, "I'tiqaf," 8; Ibn Maja, "Siyam," 65.

¹²⁰ Abu Dawud, "Adab," 80; Ibn Hanbal, 3:447.

His concern in this matter extended even to animals. Once, annoyed at seeing a Companion trying to deceive his horse, he said: "Stop deceiving animals. Instead, be trustworthy with them."¹²¹ Another time, while returning from a military campaign, a few Companions took some baby birds from a nest to pet them. The mother bird returned after a short while and, finding her babies gone, began to fly around in distress. When God's Messenger was informed, he was so upset that he ordered the babies returned immediately. Such an order was meant to show that representatives of trustworthiness should harm no living creatures.¹²²

Each Companion was an embodiment of trustworthiness. By virtue of this and other laudable virtues, cities and states submitted to Islam. During 'Umar's caliphate, Abu 'Ubayda, the embodiment of justice, commanded the Muslim armies in Syria. When the Byzantine Emperor set out to recapture Hims, Abu 'Ubayda decided to evacuate the city, for his forces were vastly outnumbered. He had the non-Muslim population assembled and announced: "We collected the protection tax from you because we had to defend you. Since we can't defend you against the coming Byzantine assault, we are returning the tax we collected." This was done. Pleased with the Muslim administration, Christian priests and Jewish rabbis flocked to the churches and synagogues to pray that God would cause the Muslim army to be successful.¹²³

Such was the attitude of Muslim conquerors and administrators in the lands they ruled. Muslims stayed in Spain for eight centuries. If there were enough Christians left to acquire

¹²¹ *Bukhari*, "Iman," 24; *Muslim*, "Iman," 107.

¹²² *Abu Dawud*, "Jihad," 112, "Adab," 164; *Ibn Hanbal*, 1:404.

¹²³ *Abu Dawud*, "Adab," 164; *Ibn Hanbal*, 1:404.

enough power to expel the Muslims later on, it was because of the Muslim administration's religious tolerance. Muslim rulers did not interfere with a conquered people's religion, language, or culture. If they had done so, there would have been no Christians left to recapture Spain, no Jews left to conquer Palestine, and no Christians left in the Balkans to engage in genocide. Nor would Christians have been able to destroy peoples, cultures, and languages on an almost-global scale.

Islam emphasizes trustworthiness and security to such an extent that suspicion and gossip are forbidden:

O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion, for suspicion in some cases is a grave sin. Do not spy on or gossip about one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would abhor it. Fear God, for verily God is the Acceptor of repentance, the Most Merciful. (49:12)

God's Messenger was so sensitive on this point that once when 'A'isha commented: "How long her neck is," he said: "You have gossiped about her and so ate of her flesh!"¹²⁴

He always prayed: "O God, I seek refuge in You from hunger, for how bad a companion it is! I also seek refuge in You from betrayal, for what an evil confidant it is!"¹²⁵ He also had harsh words for those who betray and are disloyal: "When God gathers together on the Day of Judgment all the people preceding and to come, a banner will be raised on behalf of every disloyal person. It will be announced: 'This is because of the disloyalty of so and so!'"¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, 7:359; *Al-Tarhib wa al-Tarhib*, 4:285.

¹²⁵ Abu Dawud, "Witr," 32; Nasa'i, "Isti'adha," 19:20; Ibn Maja, "At'ima," 53.

¹²⁶ Muslim, "Jihad," 9.

The heart of God's Messenger was closed to all evil, but open to all good. He lived in a climate of security, faithfulness, and trustworthiness. He never cheated, lied, betrayed people, just as he never gossiped about, slandered, or harbored evil suspicion about someone. In return, people relied on him and confided in him. His enemies slandered him, but no one ever accused him of lying and disloyalty. Those who turned their backs on him were deceived and dragged into wrong ways.

God's Messenger was totally reliable. His trustworthiness had two aspects: his relationship with people, and his relationship with God. The former manifested itself as complete reliability; the latter as perfect reliance on God. When combined, these two aspects ensure a peaceful atmosphere of steadfastness and security.

The Qur'an gives several examples concerning the Prophets' confidence in, and perfect reliance on, God. To cite only a few:

And recite to them the news of Noah, when he said to his people: "O my people! If my stay (with you) and my reminding (you) of the signs of God is unbearable to you, then I put my trust in God. So come together with your partners and come to an agreement on your plan! Then let not your affair be a worry to you. Pass your sentence on me, and give me no respite. (10:71)

[Hud said to his people:] I call God to witness and bear you witness that I am free from all that you ascribe as partners in worship to God, beside Him. So, plot against me, all of you, and give me no respite. I put my trust in God, my Lord and your Lord. There's not a moving creature but He has grasp of its forelock. Verily my Lord is on a straight path. (11:54-56)

Indeed there has been an excellent example for you in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their

people: "Verily we are free from you and from whatever you worship besides God; we have rejected you, and there has arisen between us and you hostility and hatred for ever, until you believe in God alone," except Abraham's saying to his father: "Verily I ask forgiveness (from God) for you, but I have no power to do anything for you before God. Our Lord! In you (alone) we put our trust, and to You (alone) we return in repentance, and to You (alone) is our final return." (60:4)

The nature of unbelief is deviation and opposition. Unbelievers see the world in darkness and feel alone in an alien world; believers see the whole universe as a cradle of brotherhood and sisterhood, and feel connected to everything. By its nature, unbelief severs relations and, as a result, unbelievers feel enmity against everything, especially believers. They cannot bear the believers' existence, so they try their best to eradicate belief. That is why all Prophets encountered severe opposition and, with their followers, suffered pitiless acts of cruelty. But due to their complete confidence in and perfect reliance on God, *they never lost heart because of what befell them in God's Way, nor did they weaken (in will) nor were they brought low* (3:146).

The Messenger's reliance on God made him fearless. He appeared in the heartland of a desert inhabited by one of the most uncivilized peoples. Despite their harsh treatment, and the strident hostility of one of his own uncles, he challenged the whole world and, through complete trust in God, carried his mission to victory. He had only a handful of supporters, and his victory came in a very short period—an unparalleled achievement. We can understand his fearless nature, which developed out of his absolute confidence in God, through the following anecdotes.

The Quraysh were so eager to kill him that just before his emigration to Madina they selected one man from each clan.

These numbered roughly 200. Led by Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab, then besieged his house. God's Messenger told his cousin 'Ali to spend the night in his bed and, throwing some dust at the hostile men while reciting: *We have put a barrier before them and behind them, and thus covered them so that they cannot see* (36:9), he departed without being seen.¹²⁷ He left Makka with his closest friend, Abu Bakr, and reached Thawr cave, which is at the top of a steep mountain. Finding him gone, the Qurayshi chiefs sent out search parties. One of these climbed the mountain up to the cave. Abu Bakr became anxious, fearing for the life of God's Messenger. However, the latter comforted him: *Do not be anxious, for God is with us* (9:40), and added: "What do you think of the two men beside whom God is the third?"¹²⁸

In the Battle of Hunayn, the Muslim army was forced to retreat. All but a few thought they were about to lose. God's Messenger spurred his horse forward and shouted: "I am a Prophet. This is not a lie! I am the son of 'Abd al-Muttalib!"¹²⁹ His courage and steadfastness were enough for his Companions to collect themselves and be victorious.

As related through various channels, during the military campaigns of Ghatfan and Anmar, a courageous chieftain named Ghowras unexpectedly appeared beside God's Messenger, who was lying under a tree. Unsheathing his sword, he asked him: "Who will save you from me now?" "God," the Messenger replied, and then prayed: "O God, protect me against him as You will." At that moment, Ghowras was knocked down and his sword slipped from his hand.

¹²⁷ Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 2:27.

¹²⁸ Bukhari, *Tafsir*, 9; *Ibn Hanbal*, 1:4.

¹²⁹ Bukhari, "Jihad," 52; *Muslim*, "Jihad," 78.

God's Messenger picked it up and asked him: "Now, who will save you from me?" Ghowras began to tremble and pleaded for his life: "You are a noble, forgiving man; only forgiveness is expected of you." God's Messenger forgave him, and when Ghowras returned to his tribe, he said: "I have just come from the best of humanity."¹³⁰

Trustworthiness is a cornerstone of belief:

God commands you to give the trust to (the charge of) those qualified for them, and when you judge between men, to judge with justice. How excellent is the teaching which He gives you! Truly God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. (4:58)

According to God's Messenger, breaching a trust is a sign of the end of time: "When a trust is breached, expect the end of time." When his Companions asked how a trust would be breached, he answered: "If a job or post is assigned to the unqualified, expect the end of time."¹³¹

Assigning qualified people to jobs or posts is a social trust and plays a significant role in public administration and social order. Its abuse causes social disorder. There should be order at all social levels, for some are to be given responsibilities by others. God's Messenger declared: "Each of you is a shepherd [manager], and each of you is responsible for your flock. The ruler is a shepherd responsible for his subjects. A husband is a shepherd responsible for his family. A woman is a shepherd responsible for her husband's house. A servant is a shepherd responsible for managing the duties or property his master entrusted to him."¹³² If everyone in a society were

¹³⁰ *Bukhari*, "Maghazi," 29, "Jihad," 83; *Muslim*, "Fada'il," 13.

¹³¹ *Bukhari*, "Ilm," 2; *Ibn Hanbal*, 3:361.

¹³² *Bukhari*, "Jumu'a," 10; *Muslim*, "Imara," 20; *Abu Dawud*, "Imara," 1.

to carry out their responsibilities, we would be living in a "society of trustworthy ones." Until that time, we can only imagine such utopias.

Trustworthiness is so essential an aspect of belief that God's Messenger once declared: "One who is not trustworthy is not a believer,"¹³³ and described a believer as one whom the people trust with their blood and property.¹³⁴ Furthermore, he said:

Promise me the following six things and I will promise you Paradise: When you speak, speak the truth; when you give a promise, carry it out; when something is entrusted to you, do not breach it; keep chaste and don't engage in illicit sexual relations; don't look at what is forbidden; and don't grasp what is forbidden.¹³⁵

Even looking with lust at one to whom you are not married is forbidden: "God says: "[Such] a glance is like a poisonous arrow from Satan's quiver. Whoever refrains out of fear of Me, I inculcate belief so firmly in their hearts that they will taste it."¹³⁶

To live in absolute security is only possible if trustworthy people are in power. If the Muslim world observes the Divine Trust and becomes the representative of trustworthiness and security in the world, a "new world order" based on justice and balance will be possible. Otherwise, humanity will continue to chase after mirages of justice, security, and happiness.

¹³³ *Ibn Hanbal*, 3:135.

¹³⁴ *Tirmidhi*, "Iman," 12; *Ibn Maja*, "Fitan," 2.

¹³⁵ *Ibn Hanbal*, 5:323.

¹³⁶ *Hindi*, *Kanz al-'Ummal*, 5:328.

Through his truthfulness, trustworthiness, and other laudable virtues, God's Messenger left an indelible mark on people of all ages. His every word and deed proclaimed his Messengership, that he was sent to guide people to truth, to bring them out of the darkness of ignorance and savagery, slavery and immorality, into the light of knowledge, high morality and love, compassion and true freedom.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ One of Avicenna's students once told him that, with his extraordinary understanding and intelligence, he could claim Prophethood and easily gather many followers. Avicenna said nothing. Some time passed, and then during the winter they undertook a journey. Avicenna awoke from his sleep one morning at dawn, woke his student and asked him to bring some water for him to drink. The student put him off and made excuses. However much Avicenna persisted, the student would not leave his warm bed. At that moment, the call to prayer was made: *God is the Greatest... I bear witness that there is no god but God. I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God...* Avicenna, taking advantage of this opportunity, finally answered his student's question:

Remember when you encouraged me to proclaim my Prophethood and that many people would follow me? Consider this: You have been my student for years and have benefited from my lessons, but you wouldn't even leave your warm bed to get some water for me. But this man, who calls us to prayer as others have done for the last 400 years, follows the (real) Prophet. He left his warm bed, as he does every morning together with hundreds of thousands of others, climbed the minaret and proclaimed God's Unity and Muhammad's Messengership. Now do you understand my position vis-à-vis the Prophet?! (Tr.)

CHAPTER 3

Prophethood: Communication and Intellect

Communication

The third attribute of Prophethood is communication of Islamic truths, otherwise known as “enjoining good and forbidding evil.” We say *Islamic* truths because every Prophet came with the same Divine Religion based on submission to God, and had as his sole mission the communication of this Message.

Just as God manifests His Mercifulness through the sun’s warmth and light, He manifested His Mercy and Compassion for humanity through Prophets. He chose Muhammad, whom He sent as a mercy for all worlds, to establish eternally the Message of compassion and mercy. If he had not been sent to revive and revise the Messages of previous Prophets and then spread that knowledge throughout the world, we would be wandering in a terrifying desert of unbelief, misguidance, and ignorance.

Philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists always have sought answers to such vital questions as: “Who am I?” “Where do I come from?” “What is my final destination?” “What is the purpose of life?” “What does our dying mean?” and “Is death absolute non-existence or only a door to a new, eternal life?” All of us wrestle with such questions. But only

through the enlightenment of the Prophets we can find true satisfaction and peace of mind. Through them, we understand that this earthly life is just a way station on our perpetual journeying from the world of spirits to the world of eternity, a field to be planted with seeds for harvesting in the eternal world. This world is reached through the intermediate realm of the grave. With this realization, we are relieved of our anxieties, and the world is transformed into a flowery garden of recreation and a gathering place of friends.

Prophets were sent to convey this Message and to illuminate the path to happiness in this world and the next. Now we will discuss three essential points regarding how a Prophet conveys the Divine Message.

A comprehensive invitation to God. The Prophets dealt with people and life in a holistic manner, appealing to each person's intellect, reason, spirit, and all outer and inner senses and feelings. They never ignored or neglected any human faculties.

The position of a Prophet in relation to Divine Revelation is similar to that of a corpse in the hands of a mortician: The individual can do nothing of his own volition.¹³⁸ God directs and guides a Prophet as necessary so that he can lead his people. Without this Divine direction, he would be unable to guide anyone. If he neglected their intellects, the end result would be a community of poor, docile mystics. If he neglected their hearts or spirits, a crude rationalism devoid of any spiritual dimension would be produced. As each individual is comprised of intellect, spirit, and body, each must be assigned its due part of the Message.

¹³⁸ This simile is coined with respect to the Prophet's submission to Revelation. He fulfils whatever he is commanded by Revelation.

Human beings are active. Therefore, they should be led to those activities that form the real purpose of their lives, as determined by God and communicated by the Prophet. God did not create people only to have them to become passive recluses, activists without reason and spirit, or rationalists without spiritual reflection and activism.

Only when the intellect, spirit, and body are harmonized, and people are motivated to activity in the illuminated way of the Divine Message, can they become complete and attain true humanity. All Prophets sought this goal, and those who seek to follow them should strive for it: *Say (Muhammad): "This is my way: I call (people) to God with wisdom and insight, I and those who follow me" (12:108).*

A Prophet is totally dedicated to his mission, and thus is an altruist who lives for the happiness and good of others. His happiness lies in seeing people devote themselves to God in the hope of salvation, not in expecting some great reward for his services. He knows that his reward is with God alone. This indispensable fact is emphasized in the Qur'an: *O my people! I ask of you no wealth for it; my reward is from none but God (11:29).*

The Prophets were charged with conveying the Divine Message. They did their best, patiently faced many misfortunes and even torment, fulfilled their responsibilities, and then left the result to God. They knew with full certainty that only God brings about the desired result. These three fundamentals set the principles for all those who wish to call others to Islam.

The method. Constant striving is an essential feature of delivering the Message, as well as an important element of the Prophetic method. A Prophet is, so to speak, obsessed with how to perform his duty. With that goal always uppermost, he

considers all circumstances and does everything permitted. As he is not responsible for the results, he leaves them to God. He knows that he cannot cause anyone to accept the Message, for he is only sent to convey it as effectively as possible: *You [O Muhammad] guide not whom you like but God guides whom He wills. And He knows best those who receive guidance* (28:56).

Many Prophets lived with no one accepting their Message. However, they did not lose heart, weaken, or resort to such improper means as violence, terror, or deception even when faced with relentless hardship and torture. When the Prophet was severely wounded at Uhud, some Companions asked him to invoke God's curse on the enemy. Instead, he prayed for them, saying: "O God, forgive my people, because they don't know."¹³⁹ He did this while his face was bleeding profusely, since he had once said: "It is as if I were seeing a Prophet who, while his face was bleeding, prayed for his people: 'O God, forgive my people, because they don't know.'"

All Prophets reacted in the same way to the torments and false accusations they had to endure. For example:

The leaders of Noah's people said: "We see you in clear deviation." He said: "O my people, there is no deviation in me. I am a Messenger from the Lord of the Worlds. I convey unto you the messages of my Lord, and give sincere advice to you. And I know from God that which you don't know." (7:60-62)

The leaders of Hud's people, who were unbelievers, said: "We see you in foolishness; and think you are a liar." He replied: "O my people, there is no foolishness in me. I am a Messenger from the Lord of the Worlds.

¹³⁹ Qadi Iyad, *Shifa' al-Sharif*, 1:105; *Bukhari*, "Anbiya'," 54; *Muslim*, "Jihad," 105.

I convey unto you the messages of my Lord, and am a trustworthy adviser to you.” (7:66-68)

Nothing changed during the history of Prophethood. The Prophets conveyed the Message for the sole purpose of God’s pleasure. A Messenger was sent to every people:

Whoever goes right, then he goes right only for his own soul’s benefit. And whoever goes astray, then he goes astray only to his own loss. No laden soul can bear another’s load. And We never punish until We have sent a Messenger. (17:15)

And We have sent among every people a Messenger (saying): “Worship God (alone), and shun all false deities.” (16:36)

After he received the first Revelation, God’s Messenger returned home in a state of great excitement. While wrapped in his cloak, God ordered him:

O you wrapped up in your cloak, arise and warn! Magnify your Lord. Cleanse your garments, and keep away from all pollution. Do not show favor, seeking worldly gain. Be patient for the sake of your Lord. (74:1-7)

He also was told:

O you folded in garments! Keep vigil the night long, except a little; half of it, or a little less, or a little more, and recite the Qur’an in slow, measured rhythmic tones. We are about to address to you words of great gravity. (73:1-5)

Every Prophet conveyed God’s Message to his people without becoming wearied or daunted. Their people’s harshness did not deter them. For example:

[Noah] said: “O my Lord! Day and night I have called my people. But my call has only added to their aversion. Every time I call on them to seek Your pardon,

they thrust their fingers in their ears and cover themselves with their garments, persisting in sin and magnifying themselves in insolent pride. Further, I have called to them aloud. Further, I have spoken to them in public and in private, saying: 'Ask forgiveness from your Lord: for He is Oft-Forgiving.'" (71:5-10)

When a people rejects the Prophet sent to them and persists in unbelief and corruption, God's wrath usually falls upon them. The Qur'an contains accounts of several devastated peoples, and we see their ruins all over the world.

Consistent effort. Communicating the Divine Message was the most essential characteristic of God's Messenger. We are worried when we are hungry or thirsty or have trouble breathing; he was worried if a day passed during which he could not convey the Divine Message to someone. He was so concerned about guidance and so pained by unbelief, that God advised him to take care of his health: [*O Muhammad*] *it may be that you will kill yourself following after them, with grief that they do not believe in this Message* (18:6).

God's Messenger invited all Makkans, both publicly and privately, to God's path. He called some extremely stubborn people, among them Abu Jahl, at least fifty times. He particularly sought his uncle Abu Talib's conversion, for he had raised him and protected him from the Makkan polytheists. In the eleventh year of his Prophethood, when Abu Talib was dying, God's Messenger again invited him to belief. However, the Makkan chiefs surrounded him to prevent this.

He was so grieved at Abu Talib's unbelief that he said: "I will ask forgiveness from God for you as long as I am not forbidden to."¹⁴⁰ A verse was revealed some time later, forbidding him to do this:

¹⁴⁰ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 3:153.

It is not fitting for the Prophet and those who believe to ask (God) to forgive polytheists, even though they be near of kin (to them), after it has become clear to them that they are companions of the Fire. (9:113)

Abu Bakr, the Prophet's closest Companion, knew how much God's Messenger desired his uncle's belief. He took his aged father, who converted on the day of the Conquest of Makka, to God's Messenger and wept bitterly. When asked why he was sobbing, he explained: "O God's Messenger, I so desired my father's belief, and now he believes. But I desired Abu Talib's belief even more, for you desired it. However, God did not grant him belief. That is why I am weeping."¹⁴¹

One of the best examples of the Messenger's concern for everyone to believe was his invitation to Wahshi, who had killed his uncle Hamza at Uhud. After the conquest of Makka, God's Messenger sent for him to accept Islam. Wahshi returned the invitation with a letter, including the following verses:

Those who invoke not with God any other deity, nor kill a soul that God has forbidden, except for just cause, nor commit illegal sexual intercourse—whoever does this shall receive the punishment. Their torment will be doubled on the Day of Judgment, and they will abide therein forever in disgrace. (25:68-69)

After the verse Wahshi added: "You invite me to accept Islam, but I have committed all the sins mentioned therein. I have lived immersed in unbelief, had illegal sexual intercourse and, in addition, killed your uncle, who was most beloved by you. Can such a person really be forgiven and become a Muslim?"

¹⁴¹ Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 4:48; Ibn Hanbal, 3:160; Ibn Hajar, *Al-Isaba*, 4:116.

God's Messenger sent him a written reply, containing the following verse:

God forgives not that partners should be associated with Him, but He forgives save that (anything else) to whom He wills. Whoever associates partners with God has invented a tremendous sin. (4:48)

Wahshi returned the letter with the excuse that the forgiveness promised in the verse depended on God's Will. Upon this, God's Messenger sent him a third letter, in which the following verse was included:

Say: "O My servants who have transgressed against their souls! Don't despair of the Mercy of God. God forgives all sins. He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate." (39:53)

Through this correspondence, God's Messenger opened Wahshi's heart to belief, and Wahshi could see himself included in the verse mentioned in the last letter. This correspondence enabled Wahshi to repent sincerely and become a Companion.¹⁴² Nevertheless, Hamza's martyrdom had affected God's Messenger so deeply that he whispered to Wahshi: "Try not to present yourself to me too often. I might remember Hamza, and thus be unable to show you the proper affection."

Wahshi did his best to comply with this request. He would stand behind a pole and try to catch a glimpse of God's Messenger in the hope that he might be allowed to present himself. When God's Messenger died soon thereafter, Wahshi set out to find a way of atonement for his act. When the war of Yamama broke out against Musaylima the Liar, he hastened to the front lines with the spear he had used to kill

¹⁴² Haythami, *Majma' al-Zawa'id*, 7:100-1.

Hamza. At the most critical point, he saw Musaylima trying to flee. Immediately, he threw his spear at the impostor and killed him. After this, Wahshi prostrated before God.¹⁴³ With tears flowing from his eyes, he was as if saying: "Will you now allow me to show myself to you, O God's Messenger?"

We cannot but wish that God's Messenger was present in spirit at Yamama and embraced Wahshi to show his pardon and full admission into his noble company.

Another fine example of God's Messenger's nobility and altruism, as well as his love for humanity and concern about people's guidance, is his acceptance of Ikrima as a Companion. Ikrima was one of the staunchest enemies of Islam and the Messenger, and an active participant in all plots to defeat him. He fled to Yemen with his wife on the day Makka was conquered, while many of his comrades chose conversion. His wife, Umm Hakam, convinced him to go to God's Messenger and ask forgiveness. Despite his previous hostility, Ikrima was welcomed by God's Messenger with the compliment: "Welcome, O emigrant rider!" After the conquest of Makka, there was no "emigration" in the true sense; God's Messenger was alluding to Ikrima's long journey from Yemen to Madina.

Ikrima was deeply affected by such nobility, and requested him to ask God's pardon for his sins. When the Messenger did so, Ikrima felt exhilarated and promised to spend for the sake of Islam double what he had spent fighting it. Ikrima fulfilled his promise at the Battle of Yarmuk, where he was wounded. Seeing his wife crying beside him in the tent, he told her: "Don't weep, for I won't die before I witness the victory." Some time later, his uncle Hisham entered and

¹⁴³ Bukhari, "Maghazi," 21; Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 3:76-77.

announced the Muslims' victory. Ikrima asked to be helped to stand up, and when they did so, whispered: "O God's Messenger, have I carried out the promise I gave you?" Then, he recited: *Make me die as a Muslim and join me to the righteous* (12:101), and submitted his soul to God.¹⁴⁴

Throughout his life, God's Messenger grieved for the misfortunes of humanity. He ceaselessly called people to God's way. During his years in Makka, he walked the streets and visited the nearby annual fairs, always hoping to gain a few converts. Insults, derision, and torture did not deter him even once. When: *Warn your tribe of the nearest kindred* (26:214) was revealed, he invited his nearest relatives over for a meal. 'Ali later narrated the incident:

God's Messenger invited his relatives to his house. After the meal, he addressed them: "God has commanded me to warn my nearest relatives. You are my tribe of the nearest kindred. I will not be able to do anything for you in the Hereafter unless you proclaim that there is no deity but God." At the end of his speech, he asked who would support him. At that time, I was a boy with puny legs and arms. When no one responded, I put aside the pitcher in my hand and declared: "I will, O Messenger of God!" The Messenger repeated the call three times, and each time only I answered him.¹⁴⁵

God's Messenger persevered, enduring relentless and increasingly harsh derision, degradation, beatings, and expulsion from the fairs. He was actually stoned by children in Ta'if.

Only in the twelfth year of his mission was he able to meet some Madinese at 'Aqaba (located outside of Makka).

¹⁴⁴ Hakim, *Mustadrak*, 3:241-43; Ibn Hajar, *Al-Isaba*, 2:496.

¹⁴⁵ Ibn Hanbal, 1:159; Haythami, 8:302-3.

He told them of Islam, and they accepted it. The following year, 70 Madinese became Muslims at the same place. They swore allegiance to God's Messenger and promised to support him if he emigrated to Madina. He appointed Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr to teach them Islam. This was the beginning of a new phase in his life. By the time he emigrated to Madina the following year, every household had at least one convert.¹⁴⁶

Further remarks. An important point to note is that while communicating the Message, the Prophet set an excellent example of ardor in guiding people. The Companions did their best to imitate his technique. For example, Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr's technique was so effective and sincere that even the most stubborn Madinese, such as Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, became Muslims. Sa'd's initial reaction to Mus'ab's activity was harsh. But when the latter asked him politely: "First sit and listen. If you are not pleased with what I tell you, feel free to cut off my head with the sword in your hand," Sa'd's anger subsided. He parted from Mus'ab as a new Muslim.

God's Messenger continued to send Companions to neighboring cities. He sent Talha to Duwmat al-Jandal, and Bara' ibn A'dhib to Yemen. If a Companion was not successful, although this was rare, he sent another in his place. When Khalid and Bara' could not capture the Yemenis' hearts, God's Messenger sent 'Ali. Shortly thereafter, almost all of them became Muslims.¹⁴⁷

Another important point is his conduct after the Treaty of Hudaibiya. Some of the Companions considered various conditions dishonorable (to the Muslims). However, in the ensuing atmosphere of peace, which followed years of dis-

¹⁴⁶ Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 2:73.

¹⁴⁷ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 5:120-21.

ruption and war, many enemies of Islam reconsidered the Message. Eventually, even such leading opponents as Khalid and 'Amr ibn al-'As accepted Islam.¹⁴⁸

God's Messenger welcomed Khalid with a compliment: "I was wondering how a sensible man like Khalid could remain an unbeliever. I had a strong conviction that you would one day accept Islam."¹⁴⁹ He comforted 'Amr ibn al-'As, who asked him to pray for God's forgiveness of him, and said: "Don't you know that those who accept Islam are cleansed of all their previous sins?"¹⁵⁰

After the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, God's Messenger sent letters to the rulers of neighboring countries. He wrote to the Negus, king of Abyssinia:

From Muhammad, God's Messenger, to the Negus Asham, King of Abyssinia. Peace be upon you! On this occasion, I praise God, the Sovereign, the Holy One free from all defects, the Giver of security, the Watcher over His creatures. I bear witness that Jesus is a spirit from God, a word from Him, whom He bestowed upon Mary, who was chaste, pure, and a virgin. I call you to God, One with no partner.¹⁵¹

The Messenger urged the Negus to convert by first greeting him with peace. Since the Negus was a Christian, God's Messenger expressed his belief in the Prophethood of Jesus and affirmed Mary's virginity and purity, thus emphasizing the point of agreement between them.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 4:272.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 4:273.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 4:271.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 3:104.

The Negus received the letter, and, kissing it, put it to his head as a sign of respect. After reading it, he accepted Islam without hesitation and dictated the following to his secretary:

To Muhammad, God's Messenger, from the Negus. I bear witness that you are the Messenger of God. If you command me to come to you, I will do it, but I am not in a position to make my subjects Muslim. O God's Messenger, I testify that what you say is all true.¹⁵²

The Negus was so sincere that one day he told his confidants: "I would rather be a servant of Muhammad than a king." When he died, God's Messenger performed the funeral prayer for him in absentia.¹⁵³

The following letter was sent to Heraclius, emperor of Byzantium:

From Muhammad, the servant of God and His Messenger, to Heraclius, the greatest of the Byzantines. Peace be upon him who follows the guidance. I invite you to Islam. Embrace Islam and secure salvation, that God may give you a double reward. If you turn away, you will be burned with, besides your own, the sins of all those who turn away (among your people). Say: "*O people of the Book. Come to a word common between us and you that we worship none but God, that we associate nothing in worship with Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. If they turn away, say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims.'*" (3:64)¹⁵⁴

The Emperor was moved by the letter. He summoned Abu Sufyan, who was then in Syria leading a Makkan trade caravan. The following dialogue took place between them:

¹⁵² Ibid., 3:105.

¹⁵³ Bukhari, "Jana'iz," 4:65; Muslim, "Jana'iz," 62-67.

¹⁵⁴ Bukhari, "Bad'u al-Wahy," 6.

- What is this man's family status?
- A noble one.
- Did any of his ancestors claim Prophethood?
- No.
- Was there a king among his ancestors?
- No.
- Do the elite or the weak mostly follow him?
- The weak.
- Has anyone apostatized after conversion to his religion?
- So far, nobody has.
- Do his followers increase or decrease?
- They increase daily.
- Have you ever heard him tell a lie?
- No.
- Has he ever broken his promise?
- Not yet, but I don't know whether he will in the future.

Although Abu Sufyan was at that time a ruthless enemy of God's Messenger, he told the truth about him except in his last words, which might raise doubts about the Messenger's future trustworthiness. The Emperor was inclined to acknowledge the faith, but seeing the reaction of the priests near to him, only concluded: "In the very near future, all these lands I am resting upon will be his."¹⁵⁵ Imam Bukhari narrates that the bishop of the area accepted Islam.¹⁵⁶

God's Messenger sent letters to other kings, among them Muqawqis, the ruler of Egypt, who responded with some pre-

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

sents.¹⁵⁷ Chosroes of Persia tore up the letter, an incident predicting his empire's end, which took place during 'Umar's caliphate.¹⁵⁸

When God orders Muhammad to communicate the Message, He addresses him as *Messenger* to show that he has the highest rank among the Prophets. All other Prophets are addressed by name; *Messenger* demonstrates that he is the foremost in conveying the Message. Islamic civilization, based upon the principles he conveyed, has attracted and astounded many, so much so that an interesting incident is recorded in *Mizanci Murad Tarihi* (History by Mizanci Murad): Auguste Comte, the atheist French philosopher, after visiting the remains of Islamic Spain, made a brief study of Islam. When he learned that Prophet Muhammad was unlettered, he said: "Muhammad was not a god, but he was not just a human being either."

However, quoting al-Busiri, we say: "The conclusion which we draw after all the information we have gathered about him is that he is a human being, but the best among God's creation."

Other important points. The following three points are important in conveying the Message of Islam: intelligence, practicing what they preach, and asking for no reward.

First, intelligence must be used to reach people on their own level. A Prophetic Tradition states: "We, the community of the Prophets, are commanded to address people according to their level of understanding." Those seeking to spread Islam should know how to approach and gain non-Muslims'

¹⁵⁷ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 5:324.

¹⁵⁸ *Bukhari*, "Ilm," 7:1; Ibn Hanbal, 1:243.

attention. This point can be illustrated by many examples from the life of God's Messenger. Here are two of them:

God's Messenger won 'Umar's heart by appreciating his good sense. He told 'Umar: "I can't understand how a reasonable man like you can expect anything from inanimate objects like stones, wood, or soil." He also inspired confidence in 'Umar through his good conduct. His committed worship of God so influenced 'Umar that at last he came to God's Messenger, and was as obedient and reverent before him as a well-mannered child before a respected father.

One day, a young man (apparently Julaybib) asked God's Messenger for permission to fornicate, since he could not restrain himself. Those who were present reacted in various ways. Some scoffed at him, others pulled his robe, and still others readied themselves to hit him. But the compassionate Prophet drew him near and engaged him in conversation. He began by asking him: "Would you let someone do this with your mother?" to which the young man replied: "My mother and father be your ransom, O God's Messenger, I don't agree with that." The Prophet said: "Naturally, no one agrees that his mother should be a party in such a disgraceful act."

He then continued asking Julaybib the same question, but substituting *daughter*, *wife*, *sister*, and *aunt* for *mother*. Every time Julaybib replied that he would not agree to such an act. By the end of this conversation, Julaybib had lost all desire to fornicate. But God's Messenger concluded this "spiritual operation" with a supplication. Placing his hand on Julaybib's chest, he prayed: "O God, forgive him, purify his heart, and maintain his chastity."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Ibn Hanbal, 5:256-57.

Julaybib became a model of chastity. Some time later he married through the intermediation of God's Messenger. Not long after that he was martyred in a battle after killing seven enemy soldiers. When his corpse was located, God's Messenger put his hand on his knee and said: "This one is of me, and I am of him."¹⁶⁰

God's Messenger was so competent and successful in educating people that it is a conclusive proof of his Prophethood. The most uncivilized, crude, ill-mannered, ruthless, and ignorant people of that time were transformed into the most praiseworthy guides of humanity in a very short period.

I wonder whether even the largest, best-equipped group of professional educators, modern pedagogues, sociologists, psychologists, teachers and the like could achieve in 100 years anywhere in the modern civilized world even a hundredth of what God's Messenger accomplished in 23 years in the uncivilized desert of Arabia fourteen centuries ago. The modern efforts and techniques applied to remove so insignificant a bad habit as smoking with almost negligible success, when compared to the Prophet's lasting success in eradicating so many bad habits and views, prove that Prophet Muhammad was without parallel or equal when it came to educating people.

Second, those who want their words to influence people must practice what they preach. If they do not, how can they expect to succeed, for it is well known that actions always speak louder than words. The Qur'an is very explicit in this matter: *O you who believe, why do you say that which you do not do? Most hateful it is in the sight of God that you say what you do not do* (61:2-3).

¹⁶⁰ Muslim, "Fada'il al-Sahaba," 131.

God's Messenger was the living embodiment of his mission. He was the foremost in practicing Islam, devotion to God, and servanthood to Him. It was not uncommon for those who saw him to require no other proof to believe in his Prophethood. For example, 'Abd Allah ibn Salam, the renowned Jewish scholar of Madina, believed in him at first sight, saying: "There can be no lie in this face. One with such a face can only be a Messenger of God."¹⁶¹

'Abd Allah ibn Rawaha, a famous poet of that time, expressed this fact in the following couplet:

Even if he had not come with manifest signs,
A single look at him suffices to inspire belief in him.¹⁶²

Those who believed in him were not foolish or unreasonable people. Among them were such people as the first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali), all of whom administered a very great state. They were so profound in spirituality and deep in belief that 'Ali, for example, once said: "If the veil (between this material world and the immaterial world) were raised, my certainty (of the Unseen) would not increase."¹⁶³

One reason why Prophet Muhammad is still loved deeply by hundreds of millions of people, regardless of unending hostile and negative propaganda, and why people all over the world embrace Islam daily, is that he practiced what he preached. For example, he invited people to worship God sincerely, and is himself the best example of such worship. He

¹⁶¹ Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 163-64.

¹⁶² Sa'id al-Hawwa, *Al-Rasul*, 1:9. For a different version, see Ibn Hajar, *Al-Isaba*, 2:307.

¹⁶³ 'Ali al-Qari, *Al-Asrar al-Marfu'a*, 286.

would spend more than half the night in prayer, crying and full of humility. When asked why he went to such lengths that his feet would swell, and did so even though he was sinless, he would answer: "Should I not be a thankful slave of God?"¹⁶⁴

'A'isha narrated that one night he asked her permission to get up and pray. He was so sensitive to the rights of his wives that he would seek their permission to perform supererogatory prayers. He prayed until daybreak and shed tears. He frequently recited the following verses:

In the creation of the Heavens and the Earth, and in the alternation of day and night, are signs for those of understanding. Those that remember God standing, sitting, and lying down, and meditate upon the creation of the Heavens and the Earth. "Our Lord, You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You. Protect us from the punishment of the Fire. Our Lord, those whom You will admit to the Fire You have abased; for wrongdoers there are no helpers. Our Lord, we have heard a caller calling to faith: 'Believe in your Lord!' So we believed. Therefore, Our Lord, forgive our sins and erase our evil deeds. Take our souls in death in the company of the righteous. Our Lord, grant us what You promised to us through Your Messengers, and do not abase us on the Day of Resurrection. You never break the promise." (3:190-94)¹⁶⁵

Again, 'A'isha reports:

I woke up one night and could not see God's Messenger beside me. I was jealous, lest he had gone to another of his wives. As I just got up from bed, my hand touched his feet. I noticed that he was prostrating, praying: "O God, I seek refuge in Your pleasure from Your wrath, and in Your forgiveness from Your punishment; I also

¹⁶⁴ Bukhari, "Tahajjud," 6; Muslim, "Munafiqin," 81.

¹⁶⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, 2:164.

seek refuge in Yourself from You. I cannot praise You as You praise Yourself.”¹⁶⁶

His life was so simple that once ‘Umar, upon seeing him, said: “O Messenger of God, kings sleep in soft, feather beds, while you lie on a rough mat. You are the Messenger of God and thereby deserve an easy life more than anyone else.” God’s Messenger answered: “Don’t you agree that the luxuries of the world should be theirs and those of the Hereafter ours?”¹⁶⁷ God’s Messenger lived for others. He desired a comfortable life for his nation, provided that his community would not be led astray by world attractions, but himself lived a very simple life.

Third, God’s Messenger, like all Prophets, expected no reward for performing his mission. He suffered hunger, thirst, and every other hardship. He was forced into exile and made the target of assaults and traps. He bore all of these simply for the good pleasure of God and the good of humanity. Abu Hurayra once saw him praying while seated and asked if he were sick. The Messenger’s reply caused Abu Hurayra to cry: “I am hungry, Abu Hurayra. Hunger has left me no strength to stand up for prayer.”¹⁶⁸ Hunger was a common feature of Muslim life. One night, God’s Messenger, Abu Bakr, and ‘Umar met each other unexpectedly outside. When they asked one another why they were outside, all replied: “Hunger.”¹⁶⁹

Even though most of his Companions became wealthier in later years, the Messenger and his family never changed their very simple lifestyle. Fatima, his only surviving child,

¹⁶⁶ *Muslim*, “Salat,” 221-2; *Abu Dawud*, “Salat,” 148; “Witr,” 5.

¹⁶⁷ *Bukhari*, “Tafsir,” 287; *Muslim*, “Talaq,” 31.

¹⁶⁸ Abu Nu‘aym, *Hilya*, 7:107; Hindi, *Kanz al-‘Ummal*, 1:199.

¹⁶⁹ *Muslim*, “Ashriba,” 140.

did all of the housework for her family by herself. Once when captives were distributed in Madina, she asked her father for a maid. He replied:

O my daughter. I can give you nothing before I satisfy the needs of the people of the *Suffa*. However, let me teach you something that is better for you than having a servant. When you go to bed, say: "Glory be to God, All praise be to God, God is the Greatest" 33 times each. [Some Traditions say that the last phrase should be recited 34 times.] This is better for your next life.¹⁷⁰

One day he saw her wearing a bracelet (or a necklace, according to another version) and warned her: "O my daughter, do you want people to say of my daughter that she is wearing a ring of Hellfire? Take it off immediately!"¹⁷¹

In addition to receiving no worldly benefit, God's Messenger bore many tortures. He often was beaten and left on the ground covered with dust, and only Fatima would run to his aid. Once he was being beaten at the Ka'ba, Abu Bakr ran to help him, shouting to those beating him: "Will you kill a man because he says: 'My Lord is God?'"¹⁷²

Intellect

Intellect is another important attribute of Prophethood. In this context, it has a specific meaning: a composite of reasoning power, sagacity, intelligence, sound judgment, and wisdom far surpassing the ability of ordinary people through a sublime power of understanding. It encompasses and coordinates all human abilities, whether of the heart and soul or of the mind.

¹⁷⁰ Bukhari, "Fada'il al-Sahaba," 9.

¹⁷¹ Nasa'i, "Zinat," 39.

¹⁷² Bukhari, "Fada'il al-Sahaba," 5; Ibn Hanbal, 2:205.

Under the influence of temporary trends, some reduce Islam to a rationalistic system. They regard reason as the ultimate authority, and make no distinction between the judgment of sound reason and the excesses and shortcomings of rationalism. All the principles of Islam, a revealed religion originating in an All-Encompassing Knowledge, can be confirmed by reason. However, a comprehensive understanding of Islam requires a Prophetic intellect to grasp the entire meaning of the universe and humanity. Islam admits reason's ultimate authority; not of human reason, which is limited by one's capacity and usually conflicts with another's, but of a Prophet's universal reason, for Islam is the name of the Divine universal order.

God manifests His Names through veils. His absolute Unity requires that we attribute effects directly to His creative Power. But His Transcendence, Grandeur, and Majesty require "natural" causes to veil His acts so that people do not ascribe to Him that which seems disagreeable to them. He raised the Prophets to communicate His Revelation. As we cannot receive Revelation directly, the Prophets functioned as a prism receiving and then reflecting Divine Revelation. They modulated the Revelation according to their audience's intellectual ability and the prevailing circumstances. In other words, the Prophetic intellect allows a Prophet to understand everything about his people and thus to answer all their questions and solve their problems.

If we study the Prophet's achievements, we see that he was a statesman and commander of the highest order. As the embodiment or most comprehensive manifestation of the Divine Attribute of Speech, he is the most influential orator we have ever seen. His words, regardless of their apparent simplicity, affect everyone, regardless of their intellectual simplicity. As human knowledge increases, we see that these

supposedly simple words are, in fact, like an ocean whose depth is only appreciated the more deeply one dives into it, or like a rose with petals one within the other, each one full of meanings.

His level of understanding was so sublime that Wahn ibn Munabbih, who was well-versed in the Torah and Gospels, said: "When compared to that of God's Messenger, humanity's total mental capacity and perception is like a single sand particle compared to all the sand in a vast desert."¹⁷³

Examples of his intellectual capacity

- Before his Prophethood, the Ka'ba was partly ruined by rain and the ensuing floods. The Quraysh restored it. However, clan warfare almost broke out over who would have the honor of restoring the sacred Black Stone to its proper place. Someone suggested that they refer the matter to whoever appeared first at the Ka'ba. To everyone's relief, this person was Muhammad. They told each other: "The Trustworthy One is coming!" After explaining the problem, he asked them to bring a piece of cloth, which he spread on the ground. Putting the Black Stone on it, he told each clan chief to hold a corner and lift the cloth. When the Black Stone was at the required height, Muhammad put it in its place. Clan warfare was thus averted.¹⁷⁴
- God's Messenger always assessed a person's or an audience's spiritual and mental capacities accurately. He spoke directly to a particular individual at a particular time and under particular circumstances; he had no need for flattery or falsehood. One time Husayn, an eloquent speaker

¹⁷³ Qadi Iyad, *Shifa'*, 1:67.

¹⁷⁴ Ibn Hanbal, 3:425; Ibn Hisham, *Sira*, 1:209.

renowned for his persuasive rhetoric, sought to dissuade him from his mission. God's Messenger listened carefully to his argument and then initiated the following dialogue:

- Husayn, how many deities do you worship?
- Eight; one in the Heavens and the others on Earth.
- Which one do you call upon when misfortune befalls you?
- The one in the Heavens.
- Which one do you call when your goods are gone?
- The one in the Heavens.

God's Messenger asked a couple of similar questions, and, upon receiving the same answer to each question, asked: "According to you, the one in the Heavens alone answers your call. Yet you continue to associate partners with Him. Isn't this what I've been preaching? There is no deity but God. Become a Muslim and be saved."¹⁷⁵ This apparently simple argument defeated Husayn with his own logic.

- Bedouins are often called "people of the desert." Their way of life engenders many unique experiences: the loss of a camel, forgetfulness of where items have been placed, or being caught in a sandstorm. However many deities they worship, they always ask God, the One, the Unique Creator of the universe, and Powerful over all things, for help and rescue. Their inner sense and sound conscience tell them the truth under the enchanting desert sky or in the darkness, and they then acknowledge His Oneness. This happened with Hamza, who proclaimed: "O Muhammad, I have perceived in the darkness of the desert night, that God is too great to be restricted within four walls!"¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Ibn Hajar, *Al-Isaba*, 1:337.

¹⁷⁶ Ajluni, *Kashf al-Khafa'*, 1:147.

God's Messenger knew everyone's mood and thus took people "by the soul" when inviting them to Islam. For example, Ahmad ibn Hanbal reports from Abu Tamima that a Bedouin once asked God's Messenger if he was Muhammad. Receiving an affirmative answer, the Bedouin asked to what he was inviting people. The Messenger replied: "To God, the All-Majestic. I invite them to Him alone, without associating any partners with Him. He is God whom you call upon when a misfortune befalls you and He who removes it. It is to Him alone that you pray during drought and famine, and He sends rain and causes the grass to grow. It is also Him you entreat when you lose something in the vast desert, and He causes you to find it." These simple, accurate, and concise words caused the Bedouin to awake to the truth and embrace Islam on the spot.¹⁷⁷

History records no other instance of an individual forming such a virtuous community so quickly and from such unpromising people and meager resources. Prophet Muhammad used the dynamics granted to him by God so effectively that historians and sociologists still cannot fully grasp all dimensions of his revolutionary Message. Its waves have swept through the ages, and continue to attract increasing numbers of people from all over the world into the peaceful ocean of Islam.

- The Prophet solved problems, as Bernard Shaw pointed out, as easily as one drinks coffee. Even when faced with the most unexpected emergencies, he remained calm and solved the problem to everyone's satisfaction. His whole life shows that he was a man of perfect balance, and that this balance was never lost.

¹⁷⁷ Ibn Hanbal, 4:65; 5:64.

Expanding on this last item, consider the following example. After the conquest of Makka, many former enemies proclaimed their conversion. Naturally, it was difficult for them to acquire sincere belief so quickly. So, God's Messenger sought to "reconcile their hearts" and increase their commitment by preferring them over the Muslims when distributing the war spoils after the Battle of Hunayn.

The spoils consisted of 24,000 camels, 40,000 sheep and goats, and 10,000 pounds of gold and silver. God's Messenger gave 300 camels and 250 pounds of gold and silver to Abu Sufyan and his family, 200 camels to Hakim ibn Hizam, and 100 camels each to Nusayr ibn al-Harith, Qays ibn Asiyy, Safwan ibn Umayya, Malik ibn Awf, Akra ibn Habis, and 'Uyayna ibn Hisn. Such generosity also did much to repair the Makkan chiefs' wounded pride.

Some younger Ansaris, despite their devotion to God's Messenger and Islam, became upset. They did not desire the spoils themselves; rather, they did not want to see such formerly staunch enemies of Islam, in their view, rewarded. This might have led to a dissident movement among the Muslims. When informed of the situation by Sa'd ibn 'Ubada, an Ansari leader, God's Messenger ordered them to assemble so he could address them. They did so, and he opened his speech in a dramatic way designed to attract and hold their attention, and to impress their souls: "O Community of the Helpers! I hear that you are displeased with me."

He continued in this powerful and impressive style, reminding them of God's blessings upon them through him. He asked: "Were you not in misguidance when I came to you? And has God not guided you to the truth through me? Were you not in poverty when I came to you? And has God not enriched you through me? Were you not in internal con-

flicts when I came to you? And has God not reconciled you through me?" They agreed to all of this, answering each question with: "True, O God's Messenger! We are indebted to God and His Messenger!"

After reminding them of these blessings, God's Messenger recounted their services to Islam, saying: "O Ansar! If you had desired, you could have answered me differently and said: 'Your people denied you, but we believed in you. You came to us with no one to defend you, but we admitted and protected you. Your people exiled you, but we embraced you. You came to us with nothing to subsist on, and we met all your needs.' If you had responded thus to me, you would have told the truth and no one would have stood up to contradict you."

He continued: "O Ansar! Even if you're upset with my actions, wouldn't you rather return home with God's Messenger while they return with camels and sheep? I swear by God, in Whose Hand of Power is my soul, that if all other people took a different direction than that of the Ansar, I wouldn't hesitate to go with the Ansar! Had it not been for the Emigration, I would have wished with all my heart to be one of the Ansar! O God, protect the Ansar and their descendants!" These words were enough for the Ansar to burst into tears, and all of them responded with one voice: "We are content with God and His Messenger! We desire nothing else!"¹⁷⁸

Although uttered on the spur of the moment, this speech both quashed a potential dissident movement and reconquered the Ansar's hearts. Let's analyze this speech so that its wisdom can be better understood and appreciated.

¹⁷⁸ *Bukhari*, "Manaqib al-Ansar," 1:2; *Muslim*, "Zakat," 132-41.

- He addressed the Ansar only, for they were the offended party. This showed them special honor, and exerted a psychological influence upon them from the outset. It also prevented any ill-will among the Muhajirun, who had been forced to emigrate to Madina, or the new Muslims of Makka, many of whom still had to be won over.
- His speech, when considered in its Arabic original, is an extraordinarily eloquent rhetorical document.
- His opening was dramatic, for it was designed to win the audience's attention. Their attention never wavered, for the rest of his speech was just as dramatic and effective.
- He did not resort to flattery or diplomacy. Rather, he spoke in plain sincerity, which was vital in securing the desired influence upon the listeners.
- The spur-of-the-moment nature of his speech also was significant in obtaining the desired result. The freshness and force of such an unprepared address, on such occasions, is often more effective than a speech prepared in advance.

Those few examples illustrate the intellect of God's Messenger, and show that he did not speak or act of himself; rather, what he said and did carried the charge or force of one fulfilling a Divine mission.

Concise speech. Another dimension of his intellect is the very concise nature of his speech. Remember that he is the leader not only of those who lived during his lifetime, but of every believer to come. He was sent to address people of every level, from ignorant seventh-century bedouins to those of the highest intellectual and scientific achievements, until the Day of Judgment. No one has yet been able to disprove what he said. Accordingly, after we scrutinize his Traditions and the Qur'an, we realize that they complement each other in

style and content. Moreover, there is no contradiction between them and established scientific knowledge. Ever since the Revelation, billions of people have found in the Qur'an answers for their intellectual problems, cures for their spiritual diseases, and models for their behavior in all circumstances.

The enchanting, captivating, and informative words of God's Messenger that so enlightened his Companions intellectually and revived them spiritually have exerted the same influence on countless scholars, scientists, Qur'anic exegetes, Traditionists, jurists, spiritual guides, and specialists in science and humanities. Such people, the vast majority of whom have been non-Arab, have used the Qur'an and Sunna as the foundational sources of their academic studies and endeavors.

Even today, his words are enough to cause people to reform themselves and embrace Islam. He acknowledged this as one of God's blessings and, to emphasize it as so, would sometimes say: "I am Muhammad, an unlettered Prophet. No Prophet will come after me. I have been distinguished with conciseness of speech and comprehensiveness of meaning,"¹⁷⁹ and: "O people, I have been honored with conciseness of speech and giving the final judgment in all matters."¹⁸⁰

The nightingale is said to convey the gratitude of plants and flowers to the All-Provider. Likewise, God's Messenger came to "sing" the praises of God in the "garden" of humanity and announce His Commandments with his enchanting "songs." His words opened ever-fresh flowers in all human hearts and reduced the words of others, regardless of their surface beauty, to nothing. Believers were purified by his words' deep serenity, exhilarated by the bright atmosphere created

¹⁷⁹ Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummal*, 11:412.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 11:425.

through his speeches, and by the love his personal conduct inspired. Through his words and deeds, God's Messenger removed the veils from the "face" of nature and embellished the "Book of the Universe" with Divine inscriptions.

Many famous rhetors, orators, and poets have preferred to listen to him or have benefited greatly from his words. Thousands of literary people have devoted their lives to studying his sayings, and have compiled multi-volumed books about or out of them. Many thinkers and scholars have quenched their "thirst" with the "water of life" found therein. In order to express the beauty and comprehensiveness of his words, we provide a slightly adapted version of a couplet uttered about the Qur'an:

Almost nothing of this world
has come unveiled or pure,
But the words of the Messenger
preserve their purity undefiled,
and still wait to be understood fully.

As God's Messenger was unlettered, he was not influenced by his era's written culture. His conscience was so sound, his intellect so comprehensive, and his character so pure that only he could have received Divine Revelation. His mind and heart were fed by Divine Revelation exclusively. Each word and deed was a ray from that Revelation, a sign of his Messengership. Like a bright, crystal cup of clear, sweet water, his intellect was so pure that Divine Revelation entered it and emerged from it, drop by drop, in the form of words in their original clarity.

The primary expression of Divine Revelation is the Qur'an. It is also the primary source for Islamic law. Although it contains guidance pertaining to all aspects of human life, the number of questions and problems put to God's Messenger meant that a second form of Revelation was necessary. This

took the form of inspiration, an implicit Revelation, to clarify Qur'anic verses or to establish new principles related to Islamic conduct. This, together with his daily words and conduct, forms the second source of Islamic law: the Sunna. This subject is discussed in the second volume of this book.

Every Prophet was supported by miracles relevant to his time and environment. For example, Moses' miracles had to appear as magic, for magic was widespread. Jesus' miracles took the form of healing, for medicine was in wide demand. Similarly, when Muhammad emerged as a Prophet, four things enjoyed popularity in Arabia: eloquence and fluency in writing and speaking, poetry and oratory, soothsaying and divination, and knowledge of the past and cosmology. The Qur'an challenged all known experts in these fields and forced them to surrender. Prophet Muhammad surpassed them through his wonderful eloquence, knowledge of the cosmos, and predictions.

As his Prophethood is universal and will exist until the Last Day, his eloquence and linguistic style will never be surpassed. His words, together with the Qur'an, supersede all literary works. Their excellence is everlasting and becomes increasingly vivid as their deeper meanings are discovered over the course of time. His words and the Qur'an are of such extraordinary nature and so full of meaning that millions of saints and people seeking Divine knowledge have obtained perfect knowledge of the Divine Essence, Attributes, and Names through them. The hidden truths of the Unseen worlds (e.g., angels, jinn, the Hereafter, Paradise, and Hell) are unveiled through them.

These two sources have also served as a pure, inexhaustible fountain of insight for countless jurists, Qur'anic interpreters, Traditionists, historians, scientists, sociologists,

psychologists, and many others. The Qur'an and the Sunna have enlightened billions of people, and have shown them how to pray, fast, give alms, and make pilgrimage—even how to eat, drink, and speak. In short, it has shown them how to conduct themselves at every moment of their lives.

Some examples are the following:

- Imam Tirmidhi relates from Ibn 'Abbas, the Scholar of the Umma, that God's Messenger said to him:

O young man, let me teach you a few principles: Observe the rights of God so that God will protect you. Observe His rights so that you always will find Him with you. When you ask something, ask it from God. When you seek help, seek it from God. Know that if everyone joined together to help you, they could only do that which God already preordained for you. If everyone joined together to hurt you, they could only do that which God already preordained for you. The Pen of Destiny has been lifted, and everything has been ordained.¹⁸¹

This *hadith* encourages submission to God, and belief in His Unity and the truth of Destiny. We should not conclude that it excludes human free will; rather, it stresses one's action, prayer, and need to strive for the desired results. It balances this with a warning that since everything is ultimately in the hands of God, we should strive in accordance with His Commandments and seek the results only from Him.

- Imam Tirmidhi relates from Ibn 'Umar: God's Messenger said: "Live in the world as if you were a stranger or traveler. Regard yourself as one of the dead."¹⁸² This succinct

¹⁸¹ Tirmidhi, "Qiyamah," 59.

¹⁸² Tirmidhi, "Zuhd," 25.

hadith encourages us to lead an austere, disciplined life based on awareness of God. It reminds us of our final destination by stressing this world's transience, and establishes the balance between this life and the next.

We are travelers in this world. Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, a thirteenth-century Turkish Sufi, says each individual is like a flute made of a reed separated from its group. We continually groan with the pangs of separation from the real Owner and our native land. We set out from the World of the Spirits and travel through the stations of our mother's womb, childhood, youth, old age, the grave, and the Resurrection. Finally, our journey ends either in Paradise or Hell. If we desire a pleasant journey and a safe arrival in Paradise, we must be aware of this life's transience and prepare for the eternal life. Although we can taste life's pleasures to a certain extent, provided they are not specifically forbidden, we should not overindulge or forget our true destination.

- Such authentic books of Tradition as *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih al-Muslim*, and *Sunan Abu Dawud* relate from 'Abd Allah Ibn Mas'ud that God's Messenger said: "Always tell the truth, for this guides to absolute piety and piety leads to Paradise. Those who always tell and pursue the truth are recorded by God as truthful. Don't lie, for this guides to sinfulness and sinfulness leads to Hellfire. Those who always tell and pursue lies are recorded by God as liars."¹⁸³

Truthfulness is an indispensable attribute of Prophethood. Truthfulness opens the door of happiness in both worlds. No one can taste true bliss while living in the darkness of lies and lying. Lying is "an assertion contrary to God's

¹⁸³ *Bukhari*, "Adab," 69; *Muslim*, "Birr," 105; *Abu Dawud*, "Adab," 80.

knowledge,” a pillar of unbelief, and the most manifest sign of hypocrisy. The current prevalence of lying is destroying our security and morality, and contaminating the whole community (especially its political circles) like a contagious disease. Any structure based on lying must eventually perish due to its very nature.

This *hadith* states that truthfulness leads to absolute piety, while lying leads to sinfulness. *Birr*, the Arabic word translated here as piety, encompasses every virtue, from sound thinking, truthfulness, and pure intention to honesty, decency, and good conduct. Its opposite, *fujur* (sinfulness), denotes every kind of deviation and evil, among them debauchery, indecency, and perversion.

- Bukhari and Muslim report from Ibn Mas‘ud that God’s Messenger said: “A man (or woman) is with him (her) whom he (she) loves.”¹⁸⁴ This *hadith* is a source of hope and consolation for those unable to adhere completely to the Divine Commandments. Those who love the Prophets and saints will be in their company in the Hereafter. Therefore, whoever desires this should love them sincerely and follow them as best they can. Those who love the enemies of God will be with them in Hell.

Nu‘ayman, a Companion, could not stop drinking alcohol. He was punished several times. When yet another Companion reproached him, God’s Messenger warned that Companion: “Don’t help Satan against your brother! I swear by God that he loves God and His Messenger.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, those who are trying their best to reform themselves, as long as they continue to perform their obligato-

¹⁸⁴ Bukhari, “Adab,” 96; Muslim, “Birr,” 165.

¹⁸⁵ Bukhari, “Hudud,” 4:5.

ry duties and try to refrain from major sins, should be encouraged, not reprimanded. This is a prerequisite of their love for God and His Messenger.

- Ibn Hanbal related from Mu'adh ibn Jabal: God's Messenger said: "Fear God wherever you are. Do good immediately after a sinful act to erase it, and always be well-mannered in your relationship with people."¹⁸⁶ This concise *hadith* establishes the principles of a happy life and describes the way to eternal bliss. Fear of God is the basis of every virtue and good conduct, and leads to Paradise. Through this, people can erase their sins with good deeds, and being well-mannered elevates them to the rank of perfection.
- God's Messenger declares: "You are governed how you are (according to your beliefs and lifestyle.)"¹⁸⁷ This *hadith* expresses a principle of public and political administration: A country's political structure is shaped according to its people's tendencies, whether directly through democracy or indirectly through other ways. Both the natural and the social sciences have their own laws, which we call "God's creational and operational laws of the universe." According to these laws, if people immerse themselves in sin and evil, they inevitably will be ruled by evil people. If, by contrast, they prefer a virtuous life, their government will be good.

The *hadith* stresses that laws have no sanction on their own; rather, their authority depends on those who apply them. Therefore, the character of government officials is of vital importance. If the people are righteous, their

¹⁸⁶ Tirmidhi, "Birr," 55; Ibn Hanbal, 5:153.

¹⁸⁷ Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummal*, 6:89.

rulers or government officials will be righteous. If they are not, no one can expect a righteous administration. The ruling elite are like the cream rising to the surface of a liquid: milk has its own kind of cream, as do lime and alum. When Hajjaj, a despotic commander, was reminded of 'Umar's justice, he replied: "If you were like 'Umar's people, I would be like 'Umar."

The *hadith* also tells us to develop self-control and discern our own faults. Social harmony cannot be established if people tend to blame others. As emphasized in the Qur'an: *God will not change the condition of a people unless they change themselves* (13:11). We are the ones who determine our fate and make our own history.

- Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Dawud relate from 'Umar that God's Messenger said: "Actions are judged according to intentions. One is rewarded for whatever one intends to do. Whoever emigrates for God and His Messenger has emigrated for God and His Messenger; whoever emigrates to acquire something worldly or to marry has emigrated for what is intended."¹⁸⁸ This *hadith* concerns a Companion who emigrated to marry Umm Qays. It is considered a cornerstone of Islamic law and the foremost standard for evaluating a believer's actions.

Intention is the spirit of our actions. For example, if we fulfill our religious duties without making a specific intention to do so, they are unacceptable to God. If we do not seek God's good pleasure, what we do is not rewarded by God. Hijra (sacred emigration in the way of God) can be considered a twin of jihad (holy struggle in the way of God).

¹⁸⁸ Bukhari, "Bad'u al-Wahy," 1; Muslim, "'Imara," 155; Abu Dawud, "Talaq," 11.

Although there is no hijra after the conquest of Makka, it will continue elsewhere along with jihad until the Last Day. Believers may emigrate to preach Islam, as God's Messenger and his Companions did when they could no longer do this in Makka. Such emigrations are accepted as hijra when done purely for the sake of God. Intention can sometimes be rewarded without action. For example, if we sincerely intend to do something good but cannot, for some justifiable reason, we will be rewarded for what we intended to do.

Intention multiplies an action's reward, and transforms every action into a kind of worship. We cannot earn eternal happiness in this short worldly life. But by intending to worship God as if we were to live forever, we can become deserving of the eternal life of Paradise. Unbelievers whose hearts are closed to belief, according to the same principle, deserve the eternal punishment of Hellfire. Believers who sleep after the night prayer with the intention of getting up before dawn to pray *tahajjud* are recorded as having worshipped God for the whole night. This is why God's Messenger declared: "A believer's intention is more rewarding than his [or her] action."¹⁸⁹

- Bukhari records that God's Messenger said: "The Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand Muslims are safe. The Emigrant is one who emigrates from what God forbids."¹⁹⁰ This short *hadith* expresses many truths. First of all, it describes the ideal or norm by beginning with *the Muslim*, as opposed to *a Muslim*. In this way, our Prophet draws attention to the qualities of perfect Muslims, not to those who are only nominal Muslims.

¹⁸⁹ Dahabi, *Majma' al-Zawa'id*, 1:61, 109.

¹⁹⁰ Bukhari, "Iman," 4.

The word *Muslim*, derived from the infinitive *silm* (security, peace, and salvation), comes to mean one who desires and gives peace, security, and salvation. So, *the Muslims* are believers who embody peace, cause no trouble for anyone, from whom all are safe, and who are the most reliable representatives of peace and security. They strive to bring peace, security, and salvation to others, and dedicate themselves to disseminating their inner peace and happiness.

Our Prophet mentions the tongue before the hand, for slander, gossip, and insult often do far more damage than physical violence. If people can refrain from verbal assault, they can more easily refrain from physical assault. Moreover, self-defense against physical violence is often easier than that against gossip and slander. So, true Muslims always restrain their tongues and hands so that others will be safe from them.

In the same *hadith*, emigration means more than leaving one's family, house, possessions, and native land for the sake of God. To be capable of the latter, one must first emigrate from the material to the spiritual dimension of his or her being, from worldly pleasures to an altruistic life, and from selfish aims to living for a Divine cause. Therefore, obeying Divine prohibitions is directly related to being a good Muslim and to sacrificing one's life in the service of people purely for the sake of God.

- God's Messenger says: "Being a good Muslim causes people to abandon that which is of no use to them."¹⁹¹ Such people practice *ihsan*, a term denoting that we worship God as if we see Him, fully aware that even if we cannot see God, He sees us all the time.¹⁹² Those who reach this

¹⁹¹ *Tirmidhi*, "Zuhd," 11; *Ibn Maja*, "Fitan," 12.

¹⁹² *Bukhari*, "Iman," 37; *Muslim*, "Iman," 1.

rank can say: "I was searching for Him in the outer world, but now I have come to understand that He is the Soul within my soul" or "I expected some news from beyond the world. However, the veil has been removed from my soul and I have seen myself."

To attain this degree, worshippers should abandon whatever is vain and useless. They should know that God is watching them, and that God's Messenger and discerning believers are aware of their deeds' true value. God says:

Say: "Work, and (know that) God will behold your work, and so will His Messenger and the believers; then you shall be brought back to the Knower of what is hidden and what is open, and He will declare to you all that you have done." (9:105)

Good Muslims abandon heedlessness and indifference, do their work properly, put forth their best efforts in whatever they do, and are serious and reliable in all dealings and transactions. Flippancy and frivolity injure one's reliability and reduce one's dignity.

- Both Bukhari and Muslim relate that God's Messenger said: "Patience is shown at the moment of misfortune."¹⁹³ In the early days of his mission, God's Messenger forbade people to visit graves, as some un-Islamic practices were still observed. After such practices vanished, he encouraged his Companions to visit graves, and did so himself, for this encourages people to improve their moral conduct and strive for the next life.

During a visit to Madina's graveyard, God's Messenger saw a woman weeping bitterly and complaining about Destiny. When he sought to console her, the woman, who did not recognize him, angrily told him to go away, for:

¹⁹³ Bukhari, "Jana'iz," 43; Muslim, "Jana'iz," 14, 15.

“You don’t know what misfortune has befallen me!” When she later learned his identity, she hurried after him and, finding him at home, begged his pardon. God’s Messenger told her: “Patience is shown at the moment of misfortune.”

Patience is a key to success and triumph. It means to accept pain, trouble, misfortune, and similar unpleasant facts without complaint, or loss of self-control, trust, or belief in God and Destiny. Sometimes one can achieve patience in difficult circumstances by changing one’s attitude, place, preoccupation, or immediate conditions. Performing *wudu’* (ritual ablution) or praying also may help one deal with sorrow.

There are several kinds of patience:

- Determination to avoid sins. This elevates one to the rank of the God-fearing, whom God takes into His care.
 - Constant and regular worship of God. This causes one to acquire the rank of being a beloved of God.
 - Acceptance of misfortune without complaint. This causes one to be included among the people of patience and those who put their trust in God.
 - Dealing with exasperation. This means having a realistic understanding of what is required to achieve a specific result. For example, producing a loaf of bread requires that the field be cultivated, the crop harvested, the grain taken to a mill, and the dough shaped into loaves and baked in an oven. If, out of impatience or neglect, this procedure is not followed exactly and in this specific order, a loaf of bread will not be produced.
- Bukhari, Muslim, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal record that God’s Messenger said: “The upper hand is better than the

lower one.”¹⁹⁴ In another *hadith*, God’s Messenger explains that the upper hand gives to the poor and needy, while the lower hand takes from others. So, besides expressing the merits of charity, this *hadith* encourages people to work and earn their living.

A subtle point: God’s Messenger did not say *the one who gives* and *the one who receives*. Instead, he said *the upper hand* and *the lower hand*. This indicates that the act, not the person, is generally preferable. As a result, the recipient may sometimes be better than the giver.

For example some people, like Bara’ ibn Malik, appear to be very low but are so beloved in His sight that whatever they predict, and then swear on by God, comes true. Such people ask for nothing and are extraordinarily independent. God’s Messenger advised Thawban not to beg. As a result, he would not even ask someone to pick up a whip he dropped while riding his camel. So, when seemingly “poor” believers of this quality receive from people, it cannot be said that they are inferior to those who give.

Islam does not approve of begging either on the individual or the national level. It should never be forgotten that honor, dignity, and superiority always belong to God, His Messenger, and the believers. Therefore Muslims should not come under the control or authority of unbelievers, for this undermines their dignity and superiority.

- Imam Muslim relates from God’s Messenger: On the Last Day, God will not talk to, pay attention to, or purify three types of people. A painful torment awaits them. These are the people who “drag their robes,” who remind those they

¹⁹⁴ *Bukhari*, “Wasaya,” 9; “Zakat,” 18; *Muslim*, “Zakat,” 94; Ibn Hanbal, 2:4.

have favored of their favors, and who try to sell their goods by false oaths.¹⁹⁵

The *hadith* begins with *thalathatun* (three), meaning any three, unnamed, unworthy of being named. In other words, they may be met anywhere, and they and their actions are so despicable that Muslims should avoid them. God will ignore such people in the next world. This is a severe punishment, for, as stated in *Surat al-Rahman*, speech is one of the foremost and greatest favors of God to humanity. Besides, we will be in dire need of speaking on the Day of Judgment, when we try to justify ourselves. These people, however, will be told: *Be driven into it (the Fire)! Don't speak to Me!* (23:108).

On that day, everyone will be occupied with their own troubles, and there will be no refuge except God. Everyone will hope that God will give them some personal attention, that He will look upon them with mercy and purify them. But those three sorts of people will have no hope of being purified and forgiven, since God Almighty will not acknowledge them.

In the *hadith*, their punishment is announced before their sins are identified. God's Messenger thereby emphasizes the gravity of their sins and warns everybody to refrain from them. The first and most grievous sin is "dragging one's robe," an Arabic idiom for arrogance.

Arrogance means to contest with God for the rule of the Earth. Human beings, despite their vast weakness, poverty, and powerless are nevertheless enchanted with themselves. They consider their abilities, skills, position, wealth, apparent accomplishments, and so on worthy of

¹⁹⁵ Muslim, "Iman," 171-4; Suyuti, *Al-Fath al-Kabir*, 2:57.

pride. This leads to self-conceit and self-pride. Though created from a drop of lowly “water” and unable to choose their time and place of their birth, family, color, and race, this self-pride grows despite their inability to satisfy their bodies’ operative needs.

For example, they cannot satisfy their hunger, thirst, and sleep on their own. The only reason human beings survive is because God has endowed them with various talents and faculties. But people ignore this fact, attribute their accomplishments to themselves, and so contest with God. Such arrogance eventually blinds them to innumerable signs pointing to God’s Existence, Unity, and Absolute Sovereignty. In the words of the Qur’an:

Those who behave arrogantly on the Earth in defiance of truth—I will turn them away from My signs: even if they see all the signs, they will not believe in them; even if they see the way of guidance and right conduct, they will not choose it for their way. For they rejected Our signs, and gave no heed to them. (7:146)

The second grave sin is reminding others of the favors you have done for them. This is closely related to arrogance, for those who consider what God has bestowed upon them as their own possessions and abilities tend to engage in this sin as well. Those who regard everything as a gift from God understand that they can benefit others only if He allows them to do so. As a result, those who do the favor actually feel indebted to those they have helped, for such actions allow them to receive a spiritual reward. This *hadith* encourages people to disinterested generosity and altruism, concerning which God’s Messenger says:

The generous are near to God, to Paradise, and to people, and distant from Hell. The miserly, howev-

er, are distant from God, from Paradise, and from human beings, but near to Hell.¹⁹⁶

The last grave sin is deception in trade. According to the laws of Islam, merchants must disclose any defect in what they are selling. Swearing by God is also prohibited, especially in transactions. If merchants try to sell their goods through lies or false oaths, or stir up demand by swearing by God, they are committing a great sin deserving of severe punishment. This sin is closely linked to the two earlier ones, for it usually originates in miserliness and one's non-recognition of God. Besides being connected with unbelief in and distrust of God, these three sins poison society's life and indicate weak character. Hence, the severity of their punishment.

- Imam Bukhari records in his *Sahih* that God's Messenger said: "Whoever guarantees to me what is between their lips and what is between their legs, I will guarantee them Paradise."¹⁹⁷ As speech is one of the greatest favors of God, we should use our tongues only for good and useful acts, such as reciting the Qur'an, praying, telling the truth, and enjoining good and forbidding evil. We should be modest and well-mannered in our speech, and not engage in lying, profanity, slander, gossip, and so on. Words should be chosen carefully, for, as 'Ali said: "Your word is dependent on you until you utter it; once you utter it, however, you are dependent on it."

Controlling one's sexual lust is very important for attaining human perfection and deserving Paradise. God has endowed us with many faculties and impulses so that we might evolve spiritually by restraining them and, channel-

¹⁹⁶ *Tirmidhi*, "Birr," 40.

¹⁹⁷ *Bukhari*, "Riqaq," 23.

ing them into good deeds and virtues, attain higher spiritual ranks. By struggling to satisfy desires only in lawful ways, we can attain the rank of sainthood and gain superiority over angels. Since angels have no carnal desires and thus do not struggle against temptation, they do not evolve spiritually. However, because of our essential duality, we travel between the lowest (more wretched than Satan) and the highest (surpassing the angels) levels.

Since Islam bans or blocks the ways leading to forbidden acts, one should refrain from such acts as displaying personal charm or beauty, gazing at the opposite sex, and being alone with someone of the opposite sex in such places that encourage illicit sexual relations. Like holding one's tongue, this requires strong willpower, self-discipline, and continuous struggle. Even though it seems at first sight to be too difficult, it will engender great spiritual pleasure, for the pleasure of labor and struggle lies in labor and struggle themselves. Those who are successful will be deserving of Paradise.

- Muslim records God's Messenger as having discussed forgiveness. He once asked:

"Listen. Shall I guide you to the things through which God blots out sins and elevates you to higher ranks?" When his Companions asked him to do so, he told them: "Perform *wudu*' (ritual ablution) as correctly as possible, even in the most adverse conditions; walk to the mosque for each prayer; and wait for the next prayer after praying. This is the *ribat*, this is the *ribat* (preparation, dedication)."¹⁹⁸

The *hadith* begins with *Listen* to stress the importance of what follows. In this case, it is the five daily prayers.

¹⁹⁸ Muslim, "Tahara," 41; Tirmidhi, "Tahara," 39.

The prescribed prayer is the pillar of Islam. Without it, Islam cannot be maintained. When believers pray correctly, they are protected from evil thoughts and deeds. It is also a sacred ladder for ascending to the Presence of God. But before we can climb it, we must perform *wudu'* as perfectly as possible. From the first step toward *wudu'*, believers begin to gain reward. While performing it, they are relieved of the stress of daily life and cleansed of sins. When performed in difficult circumstances, believers receive an even greater exhilaration.

Adhan (the call to prayer) is both the call for believers to enter the Presence of God and the call to prosperity in both worlds. *Wudu'* is the preparation that believers must make before entering this Presence. By performing the supererogatory prayer before the prescribed one, believers complete their preparations and receive permission from the God's aide-de-camp: Prophet Muhammad. When the *muezzin* (caller to prayer) calls *iqamah* (the beginning of the prayer), believers enter His Presence with total respect and reverence, converse with the Unique Owner of the universe, and petition Him for their needs and desires.

Believers pray five times a day, thereby having their sins erased and their potential to commit sins changed into "seeds of blessed trees of good and virtue." There is, however, one condition: The prayer must be performed with absolute sincerity, with pure intention to gain God's good pleasure only, and in full awareness of being in the Presence of the Creator and Owner of the universe, the All-Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Seeing, All-Hearing, and All-Overwhelming.

God's Messenger describes the prescribed prayer as *ribat*, which can be translated as "dedication to something or

guarding the frontier.” It appears in the Qur’an: *O you who believe! Persevere in patience and vie in such perseverance; be alert and prepared for jihad; and fear God, so that you may prosper* (3:200) and: *Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including horses dedicated to war* (8:60).

In the first verse, *ribat* means being alert and prepared; in the second, dedicated. By describing the prayer with this term, God’s Messenger stresses the value and importance of struggling in God’s way as well as the primacy of the prescribed prayers in Islam and a believer’s life. In another *hadith*, he calls the former *the lesser jihad* and the latter *the greater jihad*. To succeed in the former, believers must be very attentive while performing the latter.

By describing the prescribed prayers as *ribat*, God’s Messenger also emphasizes that Muslims should dedicate their lives to Divine worship and organize their daily activities around the five daily prayers. They should ensure that they can pray when necessary and with full attention. After each prayer, they should wait expectantly for the next one. Those who pray in such a manner will be cleansed of sins and, moreover, protected against committing more sins. Then they will experience, as another *hadith* says, something like a *mi’raj* (ascension to God’s Presence).

- Bukhari relates that God’s Messenger said: “God says: ‘I have prepared for My righteous servants such things of which they have never seen, heard, or imagined.’”¹⁹⁹ Paradise is the place of surprises. The Qur’an tells us of its bounties using familiar words so that we can get some idea of them. But as Ibn ‘Abbas points out: *They are given*

¹⁹⁹ Bukhari, “Tawhid,” 35.

things in similitude (2:25), means that these bounties are particular to Paradise in nature and taste; their appearance, however, is like that of their counterparts in the world. Believers will be rewarded in Paradise with ever-renewed bounties and, above all, will observe God free from any qualitative and quantitative dimensions. An instant of this observation will surpass, in delight and blessing, thousands of years of life in Paradise. But the greatest bounty of all in Paradise is that God will be pleased with believers forever.

To be worthy of Paradise, we must be righteous, upright in all our deeds, and do everything as perfectly as possible. Righteous believers do not lie or deceive others, and are completely reliable. God is confident that they will perform their religious duties as carefully as possible and obey His prohibitions. All other parts of creation are sure such believers will never hurt them. Such people do everything in full awareness that God Almighty is watching them. Since they have gained their Lord's good pleasure, they are counted among those whom God calls *My righteous servants*. That is, they are loved by God and, as a result: "He is their eyes with which they see, their ears with which they hear, their hands with which they hold, and their feet on which they walk."

God multiplies the good deeds of His servants and gives, in certain circumstances, millions of rewards for each deed. This is why believers will meet in Paradise such bounties as they could never have imagined while alive.

- In a *hadith* related by Bukhari and Muslim, God's Messenger says: "Paradise is surrounded by trouble and tribulation, and Hell is concealed in pleasure."²⁰⁰ Paradise

²⁰⁰ Bukhari, "Riqaq," 28; Muslim, "Janna," 1.

and Hell are, in essence, blessings for humanity. Fear of Hell causes us to observe God's prohibitions so that we may go to Paradise. However, being saved from Hell and becoming deserving of Paradise requires great self-discipline and strict intellectual and spiritual training.

The Qur'an says that people are tempted by love of the *opposite sex, children, hoarded treasures of gold and silver, splendid mounts, cattle, and plantations* (3:14). People have a natural attachment to life and its pleasures. Hell is an abode of torment placed within an attractive setting of enticing lures and pleasures. If we are captivated and live only to satisfy such desires, we are lured toward Hell. We can reach this destination easily, for the path to Hell passes through worldly attractions of every kind.

To reach Paradise, we first have to train ourselves to ignore worldly attractions. Hell is part of the way to Paradise, for we must travel to Hell without allowing any of its attractions to seduce us. This requires self-discipline and continuous struggle against temptation and the carnal self's desires. Whenever we are invited to enjoy such worldly luxuries as fame, wealth, and status, we must restrict ourselves to the boundaries set by Divine Commandments. We must continue to pray, fast, give alms, and (if possible) perform the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba.

In addition, we must engage only in fairness; honesty; truthfulness; kindness to the poor, the needy, and orphans; and enjoin good and forbid evil. We also must refrain from deception, usury, gambling, drinking alcohol, backbiting, hypocrisy, and every form of injustice. We should expect to be tested, for: *God will test you with afflictions and something of fear and hunger, and loss in goods or lives or in the fruits of his toil and earnings* (2:155). To reach Paradise, we must persevere, endure affliction, per-

form what is obligatory, avoid sin, and thank God for His bounties and blessings. Such virtuous acts are hated by our carnal selves.

- Imam Tirmidhi relates that God's Messenger said:

I advise you to fear God and obey, even if a black slave becomes your leader. Those of you who live long enough will see great controversy, so adhere to my Sunna and the Sunna of the rightly guided caliphs. Cling to them stubbornly. Beware of newly invented matters in religion, for every invented matter is an innovation. Every innovation is going astray, and every going astray is in Hellfire.²⁰¹

The Arabic word translated here as "fear of God" is *taqwa*. Derived from *wiqaya* (protection), *taqwa* means to be in the safekeeping or protection of God. This has two aspects. The first is that believers fear God and obey Him by observing His commands and prohibitions. The second aspect is that, by studying nature and life and discovering the laws of God that control them, people acquire scientific knowledge and order their lives. Science cannot be established if people do not discover these laws.

To be under the safekeeping of God, true religion and science should be combined, for they are two expressions of a single truth. According to Muslim sages and scholars, the universe is "the Created Qur'an," where God's laws issuing from His Attributes of Will, Destiny, and Power are operative. The Qur'an, the collection of Divine laws issuing from God's Attribute of Speech, is "the composed universe" or "the universe in words."

The second point is that believers should not disobey their government without justifiable cause. Without a leader, a

²⁰¹ Tirmidhi, "Ilm," 16; for different versions, see, *Ibn Maja*, "Muqaddima," 6.

community is like a broken rosary whose beads have scattered everywhere. Such a situation of social and political conflict usually results in anarchy and destruction. The *hadith* also points out a truth that even modern democracies have proven unable to grasp: no racial discrimination. It is clearly stated that an emancipated black slave can lead the Muslim community. This was not only a theoretical assertion, but was testified to by the numerous and great black saints, administrators, and scholars who were respected and obeyed.

God's Messenger also draws attention here to his Sunna. As he is the most excellent example for all aspects of life, believers are to follow his example until the Last Day. Such adherence guarantees that Islam retains its original purity. Any deviation will result in social and doctrinal splits and new importations into Islam—God has declared: *He had perfected* (5:43). Adherence to the way of the first four caliphs also guarantees of Muslim unity and Islam's maintenance.

This *hadith* also contains a prediction that his first four political successors would be rightly guided, and that disobedience to them would cause internal splits. Islamic history records the truth of this statement. Just look at the uprisings during the caliphates of 'Uthman and 'Ali.

- Bukhari and Muslim relate that God's Messenger said: "Believers are not bitten twice from the same hole."²⁰² Believers have insight, perceptiveness, and intelligence, for they are distinguished by their sound reasoning and spiritual insight. The Muslim community has—and should have—the same perceptiveness and always be aware of potential dangers or problems. They may be

²⁰² Bukhari, "Adab," 83; Muslim, "Zuhd," 63.

deceived once, but the insight and awareness provided by belief should prevent them from being deceived twice. This *hadith* contains a significant warning for contemporary Muslims, who have been deceived for centuries by the West and the hypocrites (communists) of the East. Muslims must take control of their own affairs and re-examine the quality of their belief.

- One *hadith* recorded by Bukhari and Muslim calls educators to re-evaluate their methods: "Human beings are like ores containing silver or gold. Those who are promising and in leading positions in unbelief are better than others (in virtue) when they accept Islam and acquire a good understanding of it." ²⁰³ This *hadith* is very significant, especially with respect to education, which demands the imparting of insight and perceptiveness. The Prophet said: *This is my way: I call unto God with insight and sure knowledge, I and those who follow me* (12:108).

Insight implies knowing each individual's character, potential, and shortcomings. Human beings are not alike in character, capacity, ambition, and taste. For example, they can be said to "contain coal, copper, silver, gold, and diamonds." The first step in providing a good education is to recognize individual potentialities and figure out how to develop them. Just as you cannot obtain gold from a coal mine, you cannot develop "copper" people into "gold" people. Conversely, if you try to extract copper via the gold-ore extraction method, your efforts will be fruitless.

We also should note that those with great potential always distinguish themselves. For example, such leading opponents of Islam as 'Umar eventually embraced Islam and became leading figures of the Muslim community. This

²⁰³ Bukhari, "Manaqib," 1; Muslim, "Birr," 160; Ibn Hanbal, 2:539.

shows that their potential for virtue is refined and developed fully in the crucible of Islam.

- In another *hadith*, God's Messenger said: "Surely God grants the wrongdoer, the oppressor, a reprieve. But once He seizes him, He utterly destroys him."²⁰⁴ Then he recited: *Such is the chastisement of your Lord when He chastises communities in the midst of their wrong: grievous, indeed, and severe is His chastisement* (11:102).

God gives the wrongdoers some time to repent and amend their behavior. If they do not take advantage of this opportunity, He punishes them severely.

God sometimes uses wrongdoers as a "sword of God" to punish the sinful. Muslims often become the target of wrongdoing powers when they deviate from Islam and abandon the Divine Commandments. This happens when God wills to punish them before the Day of Judgment.

For example, after the Muslims split into many competing factions nine centuries ago, they were exposed to the Mongol invasion and massacre. Likewise, they tasted the bitterness of overall defeat and subjugation during and after the First World War. This was because they were no longer practicing Islam in their lives and because they had surrendered intellectually, spiritually, and materially to un-Islamic trends coming from the West.

However, every misfortune befalling Muslims is, on account of resulting from sin, an occasion and means for self-purification and Divine forgiveness; the beginning of a new, more splendid revival. So, the near future will witness, if God wills, the collapse of wrongdoing powers and a magnificent revival of Islam and the Muslim world.

²⁰⁴ *Bukhari*, "Tafsir," 5; *Muslim*, "Birr," 61.

- In an authentic Tradition, God's Messenger says:

God will shade seven (groups) of people under His shade on the Day when there will be no shade except His: the just ruler; young people who have grown up in worship of God, may He be glorified; those people who are greatly attached to mosques; two persons who love each other for God's sake, meet and then leave each other because of this love; men who refuse the invitations of beautiful women of rank,²⁰⁵ saying: "I fear God"; those who spend in the way of God so secretly that when they give charity to the one on his left, the one on the right does not see it; and those whose eyes fill with tears when they mention God in seclusion.²⁰⁶

People will be drenched in sweat up to their necks because of the heat of the Day of Judgment. Those who wish for His shade must strive for it according to the instructions outlined in this *hadith*.

Justice is the foundation of social life, and a just ruler is a rare occurrence. Holy and blessed indeed are those young people who can control their carnal desires and devote themselves to the worship of God. Designing one's life according to the daily prayers is a laudable virtue that pleases God Almighty. Another important quality, especially in this world of individualism and selfishness, is to

²⁰⁵ Women who resist men are certainly included in the meaning of this *hadith*. The reason why men are mentioned is that they often are attracted to women and follow their desire. Men are at greater risk than women and more liable to fall. So, the *hadith* warns men to protect themselves against illicit relationships. Men exploit the charm and beauty of women for their benefit, and unfortunately women are used to spread immorality and obscenity. It is rare in human history that women command and use men in such ways.

²⁰⁶ *Bukhari*, "Adhan," 36; *Muslim*, "Zakat," 91; *Tirmidhi*, "Zuhd," 53.

love each other for God's sake and regard the Earth as a "cradle of brotherhood and sisterhood." Chastity requires self-discipline, and is so meritorious that it elevates its practitioners to the highest ranks. Giving alms purely for God's sake and without display is almost as much encouraged in Islam as are belief and the prescribed prayers. Meditation and continuous self-supervision, accompanied by a healthy attitude of God-consciousness, prevent people from sinning and make them worthy of Paradise.

- God is kind and gives favors to everyone. Whatever people have is from God. Nevertheless, He bestowed special favors on each Prophet and community according to the dictates of the time. For example, Adam was favored with knowledge of the names (the keys to all branches of knowledge). Noah was endowed with steadfastness and perseverance; Abraham was honored with God's intimate friendship and being the father of numerous Prophets; Moses was given the ability to administer, and was exalted by being addressed by God directly; and Jesus was distinguished with patience, tolerance, and compassion. All Prophets have some share in these praiseworthy qualities, but each surpasses, on account of his mission, the others in one or more than one of those qualities.

Prophet Muhammad has all of the qualities mentioned above, except for being the father of Prophets. Moreover, because of the universal nature of his mission, he is further distinguished in the following five ways. As related by Bukhari, he says:

I have been given five things not given to anyone before me: God helps me by implanting fear in the heart of my enemies at a distance of one month's walk; the Earth has been made a place of worship and means of cleansing for me, so whenever it is time to pray my followers can pray wherever they are; the spoils of war

are lawful for me, although they were not lawful for anyone before me; I have the right to intercede (with God on behalf of believers); and, while every Prophet (before me) was sent to his people exclusively, I was sent to humanity.²⁰⁷

It is possible to deduce the following things from this *hadith*:

- Prophethood is a Divine favor bestowed by God on whomever He wishes.
- The five things mentioned in the *hadith* are exclusive to the Muslim community.
- To make your enemies fear you from great distances, maintain complete sincerity and devotion to the cause of God, as was done during the Era of Happiness when the Prophet and his true successors ruled the Muslims.
- As Islam recognizes no intermediaries between God and people, there is no church or organized and professional clergy. Although saintly people may be allowed to intercede for certain Muslims on the Day of Judgment, God's Messenger will enjoy the right of all-inclusive intercession for believers of every community.
- The spoils of war, forbidden to previous communities as a trial, are lawful for Muslims, because they must struggle in the way of God until the Last Day and convey the Message throughout the world.
- While the mission of previous Prophets was restricted to a certain people and time, God's Messenger was sent as a mercy for all worlds.

²⁰⁷ Bukhari, "Tayammum," 1; "Salat," 56.

CHAPTER 4

Prophethood: Infallibility and Bodily Perfection

Infallibility

Infallibility is a necessary attribute of the Prophets. The original Arabic word translated here as *infallibility* is *'isma*, which means “protecting, saving, or defending.” It appears in the Qur'an in several derived forms. For example, when Prophet Noah asked his son to board the Ark, the latter replied: *I will betake myself to some mountain; it will save me from the water. Noah replied: Today there is not a saving one* [active participle] *from the command of God* (11:43).

The wife of a high Egyptian official, named Potiphar in the Bible (Genesis 39:1), uses the same word in: *I did seek to seduce him, but he firmly saved himself guiltless* (12:32). The Qur'an calls believers to hold fast to the *rope of God* (the Qur'an and Islam) using the same word in a different form: *Hold fast all together to, and protect (against being divided), the rope of God* (3:103). Again, we see the same word in the verse: *God will defend (protect) you from people* (5:67).

The infallibility of Prophets is an established fact based on reason and tradition. This quality is required for several reasons. First, Prophets came to convey the Message of God. If we liken this Message to pure water or light (13:17, 24:35), the Archangel Gabriel (who brought it) and the

Prophet (who conveyed it) also must be absolutely pure. If this were not so, their impurity would pollute the Message. Every falling off is an impurity, a dark spot, in the heart. The hearts or souls of Gabriel and the Prophet are like polished mirrors that reflect the Divine Revelation to people, a cup from which people quench their thirst for the pure, Divine water.

Any black spot on the mirror would absorb a ray of that light; a single drop of mud would make the water unclear. As a result, the Prophets would not be able to deliver the complete Message. But they delivered the Message perfectly, as stated in the Qur'an:

O Messenger! Convey what has been sent to you from your Lord. If you did not, you would not have fulfilled His mission. God will defend you from people. God guides not the unbelieving people. (5:67)

Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My favor upon you, and I have chosen and approved for you Islam as religion. (5:3)

Second, the Prophets teach their people all the commands and principles of belief and conduct. So that the people learn their religion in its pristine purity and truth, and as perfectly as possible to secure their happiness and prosperity in both worlds, the Prophets must represent and then present the Revelation without fault or defect. This is their function as guides and good examples to be followed:

You have in the Messenger of God a beautiful pattern, an excellent example, for anyone who aspires after God and the Last Day, and who engages much in the remembrance of God. (33:21)

There is for you an excellent example in Abraham and those with him ... there was in them an excellent example for you—for those who aspire after God and the Last Day. (60:4, 6)

A Prophet can do or say only that which has been sanctioned by God. If he could, he would have to repent even beyond his current lifetime. For example, Abraham will tell those who approach him for intercession on the Day of Judgment to go to Moses, saying he cannot intercede for them because he spoke allusively three times in his life.²⁰⁸ Although this is not a sin, his repentance will continue in the Hereafter.

Third, the Qur'an commands believers to obey the Prophet's orders and prohibitions, without exception, and emphasizes that *it is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by God and His Messenger, to have any option about their decision* (33:36). It also warns believers that *what falls to them when God and His Messenger have given a judgment is only to say: "We have heard and obeyed"* (24:51). Absolute obedience to a Prophet means that all of his commands and prohibitions are correct and beyond reproach.

Prophethood is so great a favor that all Prophets bore extreme hardship while fulfilling the duty of thanksgiving, and always worried about not worshipping God sufficiently. Prophet Muhammad often implored God as follows:

Glory be to You. We have not been able to know You as Your knowledge requires, O Known One. Glory be to You. We have not been able to worship You as Your worship requires, O Worshipped One.

The Qur'anic verses that are sometimes understood (mistakenly) to reprimand certain Prophets for some faults or to show that they seek God's forgiveness for some sin, should be considered in this light. Besides, God's forgiveness does

²⁰⁸ Muslim, "Iman," 326.

not always mean that a sin has been committed. The Qur'anic words '*afw* (pardon) and *maghfira* (forgiveness) also signify a special favor and kindness, as well as Divine dispensation, in respect to lightening or overlooking a religious duty, as in the following verses:

If any is forced (to eat of them) by hunger, with no inclination toward transgression, God is indeed Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (5:3)

If... you find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand or earth, and rub therewith your faces and hands. For God is All-Pardoning and Oft-Forgiving. (4:43)

Fifth, sins and pardoning have different types and degrees. These are: disobeying religious commandments, and forgiveness thereof; disobeying God's laws of creation and life, and forgiveness thereof; and disobeying the rules of good manners or courtesy, and the forgiveness thereof. A fourth type, which is not a sin, involves not doing something as perfectly as possible, which is required by the love of and nearness to God. Some Prophets may have done this, but such acts cannot be considered sins according to the common definition.

Tradition also proves the Prophets' infallibility. God says of Moses: *I cast love over you from Me (and made you comely and loveable) in order that you might be brought up under My eye* (20:39). Thus, as Moses was brought up by God Himself and prepared for the mission of Messengership, how could he possibly commit a sin?

The same is true of all other Prophets. For example, God's Messenger says of Jesus: "Satan could not touch Jesus and his mother at his birth." Jesus was protected from birth until his elevation to the Presence of God:

(Mary) pointed to the infant (Jesus). They asked: "How can we talk to an infant in the cradle?" Jesus said: "I

am a servant of God. He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet. He has made me blessed wheresoever I may be, and enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live. He has made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or a wretched rebel. So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I will be raised up to life again.” (19:29-33)

Jesus, like all Prophets, was protected from sin from his birth. The Messenger, while still a child and not yet a Prophet, intended to attend two wedding ceremonies, but on each occasion was overpowered by sleep.²⁰⁹ During his youth he helped his uncles repair the Ka’ba by carrying stones. Since the stones hurt his shoulders, his uncle ‘Abbas advised him to wrap part of his lower garment around his shoulders for padding. But as soon as he did so, thereby leaving parts of his thighs exposed, he fell on his back and stared fixedly. An angel appeared and warned him: “This is not befitting for you,”²¹⁰ for later he would tell people to be well-mannered and observe Divinely ordained standards of conduct, including covering the thighs. In such ways was the future Prophet protected from his people’s pagan rituals and practices.

God’s Messenger says that “all children of Adam make mistakes and err, and the best of those who make faults and err are the repentant.”²¹¹ This implies that we are fallible by nature, not that we are condemned to make such mistakes. Whether by God’s Will and special protection or, as will be explained below, by His showing the way to become free of error or sin, even the greatest saints who continue the Prophetic mission may be infallible to some degree.

²⁰⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 2:350-51.

²¹⁰ Bukhari, “Hajj,” 42; Ibn Kathir, “Al-Bidaya,” 2:350.

²¹¹ Tirmidhi, “Qiyama,” 49; Ibn Maja, “Zuhd,” 30.

God promises to protect believers who obey Him in utmost respect and deserve His protection, and to endow them with sound judgment so that they can distinguish between truth and falsehood, right and wrong:

O you who believe! If you obey God in utmost respect, He will establish in you a Criterion (to judge between right and wrong), purify you of all your evils, and forgive you. God is of grace unbounded. (8:29)

God made a covenant with the believers that if they obey Him and strive to exalt His Word, by proclaiming His religion, He will help them and establish them firmly in the religion, protecting them against all kinds of deviation (47:7). This protection from enemies and committing sins depends upon their support of Islam and the struggle to spread it so that only God is worshipped, and that no partners are associated with Him in belief or worship, or in the creation and rule of the universe. If believers keep their promise, *God will keep His* (2:40); if they break it, *God will cause them to fail* (17:8).

God protects His servants against sin in different ways. For example, he may place obstacles in their way, establish a "warner" in their hearts, or even cause them to suffer some injury so that they physically cannot sin. Or, He may put a verse in someone's mouth, as happened with a young man during 'Umar's caliphate.

The young man was so strict and attentive in his worship that he prayed every prayer in the mosque. A woman who lived on his way to the mosque had become enamored with him and so sought to seduce him. Although he resisted her gestures, the moment came when he took a few steps in her direction. Just at this moment, he felt he was reciting: *Those who fear God, when a thought of evil from Satan assaults them, bring God to remembrance, and lo! they see (aright)* (7:201). Overwhelmed with shame before God, and with love

of God for preventing him from committing this sin, he fell down dead. When 'Umar was informed of this a few days later, he went to his grave and shouted: "*O young man. For those who fear the time when they will stand before the Lord, there will be two gardens!*" (55:46). A voice from the grave, whether that of the young man or an angel on his behalf, replied: "O Commander of the Believers, God has granted me the double of what you say."²¹²

This is how God protects His sincere servants. He says in a *hadith qudsi*²¹³:

My servants cannot draw near to me through something else more lovable to Me than performing the obligations I have enjoined upon them. Apart from those obligations, they continue to draw near to Me through supererogatory acts of worship, until I love them. When I love them, I will be their ears with which they hear, their eyes with which they see, their hands with which they grasp, and their feet on which they walk. If they ask Me for something, I will give it to them immediately. If they seek refuge in Me from something, I will protect them from it.²¹⁴

God guides His true servants to good and protects them from evil. The servants will and do what is good, and refrain from wickedness. They ask God for what is good, and whatever they ask is provided. They seek refuge in God from what is bad, and God protects them according to their request.

All Prophets were infallible, sinless, and lived completely virtuous lives. Although God sent numerous Prophets, the Qur'an specifically mentions only 28 of them. I think it

²¹² *Ibn Kathir*, "Tafsir" 3:539.

²¹³ A Prophetic saying whose meaning is directly from God.

²¹⁴ *Bukhari*, "Riqaq," 38; *Ibn Hanbal*, 6:256.

would be proper here to count them in the words of Ibrahim Haqqi, an eighteenth-century Turkish saint and religious scholar, who also was an expert in anatomy and astronomy:

Some have regarded it a religious injunction to learn the names of the Prophets.

God informed us of 28 of them in the Qur'an: Adam, Enoch, Noah, Hud, and Salih; Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael, who was a sacrifice for God; Jacob, Joseph, Shu'ayb, Lot, and John the Baptist; Zachariah and Aaron, the brother of Moses, who spoke to God; David, Solomon, Elijah, and Job; Elisha, a relative of Jesus, who was a spirit from God; Dhu al-Kifl and Jonah, who was certainly a Prophet.

The Seal of Prophets is the Beloved of God—Muhammad, Messenger of God. Scholars disagree on the Prophet-hood of Ezra, Luqman, and Dhu al-Qarnayn. Some regard them as Prophets, while others consider them saints of God.

Removing doubts

Some Qur'anic verses appear to reprimand certain Prophets or entertain the possibility that a Prophet can sin, according to the usual definition of that word. Before clarifying specific examples, it may be appropriate to acquit the Prophets of such accusations.

Genesis 19:30-38 states that Prophet Lot's two daughters caused him to get drunk so that he would impregnate them. Such a charge against a Prophet is beyond belief. Lot's people (Sodom and Gomorra) were destroyed by God for their sexual immorality. Even the Bible says that Lot and his daughters were the only ones spared, because of their belief, good conduct, and decency. This supposed "sin" of Prophet Lot is worse than the sin of his people, which caused God to destroy them!

In Genesis 38:15-18, Judah,²¹⁵ a son of Jacob, is supposed to have engaged in sexual relations with his daughter-in-law. This woman, in turn, gave birth to twin boys. Some of the Israelite Prophets were descended from them. Genesis 49:4 also claims that Jacob's other son, Reuben, slept with his father's wife (Reuben's stepmother).

Neither the sons of Jacob, whom the Qur'an mentions as "grandchildren" whose ways should be followed, nor his wives could have engaged such a behavior.²¹⁶ Our Prophet explicitly declared that there is not a single case of fornication in his lineage back to Adam,²¹⁷ and that all Prophets are brothers descended from the same father.²¹⁸ Our Prophet is a descendant of Abraham, as were Judah and the other Israelite Prophets. Thus, how could any of them be the result of an improper sexual alliance?

II Samuel 11 records that Prophet David fell in love with the wife of a commander and committed adultery with her. According to the Bible, he then had her husband sent to the front line and, after he was killed, married her.

David is a Prophet who was given a Divine Scripture (the Psalms) and who is praised in the Qur'an for his sincere and profound devotion to God:

²¹⁵ He is not mentioned in the Qur'an as a Prophet. However, the Qur'an mentions the sons of Jacob as grandchildren worthy of following. Although they wronged Joseph out of jealousy, they must have corrected their ways later. According to the Bible, not to the Qur'an, some of the Israelite Prophets were descended from Judah.

²¹⁶ Although the sons of Jacob wronged their brother Joseph out of jealousy, they must have corrected their ways later. (Tr.)

²¹⁷ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya*, 2:313-14.

²¹⁸ *Bukhari*, "Anbiya'," 48; Muslim, "Fada'il," 144.

Be patient with them, and remember Our servant David, the man of strength and abilities, who always turned to God in sincere devotion and submission. We made the mountains declare, in unison with him, Our praises, at eventide and at the break of day, and the birds gathered (in assemblies): all with him did turn to Him (in profound devotion). We strengthened his kingdom and gave him wisdom and sound judgment (in speech and decision). (38:17-20)

Though a king, he lived a simple life by his own labor. He had such a great awareness of God that he cried a great deal and fasted every other day. Our Prophet recommended this type of fast to some Companions who asked about the most rewarding type of supererogatory fasting.²¹⁹ Could such a noble Prophet ever commit adultery with a married woman, plot her husband's death, and then marry her?

In I Kings 11:1-8, despite God's command: "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods," Prophet Solomon is accused of marrying many foreign women belonging to pagan nations and following their gods and goddesses (idols). Would a Prophet be able to commit such a grievous sin as following the idols and deities of other tribes?

If the Qur'an had not been revealed, we would not be sure whether the previous Prophets really were sincere, devout, and thankful servants of God. The Qur'an frees Jesus from his followers' mistaken deification of him and from his own people's denial of his Prophethood, and explains that God had no sons and daughters. It also clears the Israelite and non-Israelite Prophets of their supposed "sins" mentioned in the Bible. It presents Jesus as a spirit from God breathed into

²¹⁹ *Bukhari*, "Tahajjud," 7, "Sawm," 59; *Muslim*, "Siyam," 182.

the Virgin Mary, Abraham as an intimate friend of God, Moses as one who spoke to God, and Solomon as a king and a Prophet who prayed to Him humbly:

O my Lord, order me that I may be grateful for your favors, which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may work the righteousness that will please You. Admit me, by Your Grace, to the ranks of Your righteous servants. (27:19)

Solomon never worshipped idols or committed a sin. Despite being the greatest and most powerful king that ever lived, he remained a humble servant of God until his death.

Several other assertions are equally impossible to accept. For example: The Bible claims that although Prophet Isaac wanted to bless his older son Esau, he mistakenly blessed Jacob, for he could not see through his wife Rebaka's trick (Genesis 27). Also, the Bible claims that Prophet Jacob wrestled with God, who appeared to him in the form of a man (Genesis 32:24-30).

Individual examples. A small minority of Muslim scholars have asserted that the Prophets may have committed insignificant sins (*zalla*: error or lapse). To prove their assertion, they cite some examples from the lives of Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Joseph.

Before elaborating upon this, it should be noted that lapses and sins have totally different definitions. Sin, for example, means disobedience to God's Commands. When the Prophets were faced with a question that they could not answer, they tended to wait for Revelation. On rare occasions, however, they used their own reason to decide the matter, as they were the foremost *mujtahids* (jurists of the highest rank who can deduce laws from the principles established by the Qur'an and the Sunna). They might have erred in their

judgments or decisions. However, such errors, which were immediately corrected by God, are not sins.

Moreover, Prophets always sought God's good pleasure and tried to obtain whatever was best. If, for some reason, they could not obtain the best but had to settle for the better, a very rare event, this does not mean that they sinned. For example: Suppose you must decide whether to recite the Qur'an in 10 days while giving due attention to each verse, or recite it in 7 days to express your deep love of the Word of God. If you choose the first option without knowing that God's greater pleasure lies in the second, you cannot be considered guilty of a sin. So, a Prophet's preference of what is better instead of the best is not a sin. However, because of his position before Him, God might sometimes reproach him mildly.

Now, we will clarify some individual examples in the lives of certain Prophets.

Adam. Adam was in the Garden before his worldly life. While therein, God told him and his wife Eve not to eat of the fruit of a particular tree. They disobeyed Him in this matter, and so were expelled from the Garden and commanded to live on earth.

Although Qur'anic interpreters differ on what the prohibited fruit was, it was most probably the human inclination toward the opposite sex. Satan approached Adam and Eve, saying that it was *a tree of eternity and of a kingdom that would never decay, the fruit of which had been prohibited to them* (20:120). Most probably knowing that they were mortal, Adam and Eve must have desired eternity through offspring, as such a desire is inherent in people. This also can be deduced from:

Then Satan whispered to them so that he might show to them that which was hidden from them of their

shame. He said: "Your Lord forbade you this tree only lest you should become angels or become immortal." And he swore to them (saying): "Truly, I am a sincere adviser to you." Thus did he lead them by a deceit. When they tasted of the tree, their shame was shown to them and they began to cover (by placing) on themselves some leaves of the Garden... (7:20-22)

Even if we accept Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit as a lapse, it is difficult to regard it as deliberate or sustained disobedience or revolt against God, which might lead us to see the Prophets as fallible. First, Adam was not a Prophet while in the Garden. Second, this lapse was the result not of willful disobedience, but merely some sort of forgetfulness. Concerning this, the Qur'an says: *We had made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot, and we found on his part no firm resolve* (20:115).

Sins committed because of forgetfulness will not be accounted for in the Hereafter. The Prophet said: "My community is exempt from being questioned about forgetting, unintentional errors, and what they are compelled to do."²⁰ The Qur'an teaches us this prayer: *Our Lord, don't condemn us if we forget or fall into error* (2:286).

Adam did not make this lapse deliberately. Although some have read into this verse Adam's lack of determination to fulfill his covenant with God, the context does not allow such an interpretation. Adam and Eve turned to God immediately after their lapse and, in sincere repentance, entreated Him: *Our Lord, we have wronged our own selves. If you don't forgive us and don't bestow Your Mercy upon us, we certainly shall be among the lost* (7:23).

²⁰ For different versions of the *hadith*, see. *Bukhari*, "Hudud," 22; *Abu Dawud*, "Hudud," 17; *Tirmidhi*, "Hudud," 1; *Ibn Maja*, "Talaq," 15,16.

Destiny had a part in Adam's lapse. God had destined him to be His vicegerent on Earth, even before his creation and settlement in the Garden. This is explicit in the Qur'an:

Behold, your Lord said to the angels: "I will make a vicegerent on Earth." They asked: "Will you make therein one who will make mischief and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praises and glorify You?" He said: "I know what you know not." (2:30)

God's Messenger also points to that truth in a *hadith*:

Adam and Moses met each other in Heaven. Moses said to Adam: "You are the father of humanity, but you caused us to come down to Earth from the Garden." Adam replied: "You are the one whom God addressed directly. Did you not see this sentence in the Torah: 'Adam had been destined to eat of that fruit 40 years before he ate of it?'"

After reporting this meeting, God's Messenger added three times: "Adam silenced Moses." ²²¹

Adam's life in the Garden and his trial were preliminaries he had to pass through before his earthly life. He passed these tests. Being chosen and rescued from the swamp of sin and deviation, he was made a Prophet and honored with being the father of thousands of Prophets, including Prophet Muhammad, and millions of saints: *Then his Lord chose him; He relented toward him, and rightly guided him* (20:122).

Noah. Prophet Noah called his people to the religion of God for 950 years. When they insisted on unbelief and persisted in their wrongdoing, God told him to build the Ark. After completing this task, Noah placed therein, according to God's command, a male and female of each animal, all his

²²¹ Bukhari, "Tafsir," 3; Tirmidhi, "Qadar," 2; Ibn Hanbal, 2:287, 314.

family members (except for those whom God already had said He would punish), and the believers (11:40).

When the Ark was floating through the mountain-high waves, Noah saw that one of his sons had not boarded the Ark. He called to him, but his son rejected his call, saying: *I will betake myself to some mountain and it will save me from the water* (11:43). When Noah saw his son drowning, he called out to God: *My Lord, my son is of my family! Your promise is true, and You are the Most Just of Judges* (11:45). God replied: *O Noah, he is not of your family, for his conduct is unrighteous. Do not ask of Me that of which you have no knowledge. I give you counsel, lest you should act like the ignorant* (11:46).

Some scholars have regarded Noah's appeal as a sin. However, it is difficult to agree with them. Noah is mentioned in the Qur'an as one of the five greatest Prophets, and is described as resolute and steadfast. He thought his son was a believer.

It is well known that the religion of God tells us to judge according to outward appearances. Thus, those who profess belief and appear to perform the religious duties of primary importance (e.g., prescribed prayers and alms-giving) are treated as believers. This is why Prophet Muhammad treated the Hypocrites as if they were Muslims. Apparently, Noah's son hid his unbelief until the Flood, for it was Noah himself who had prayed beforehand that God *should forgive him, his parents, and all who entered his house in faith, and all believing men and believing women, and grant to the wrongdoers no increase but perdition* (71:28).

God accepted his prayer and told him to board the Ark with his family, except those who had already deserved punishment because of their willful insistence on unbelief.

Noah's wife was among those who drowned. Noah did not ask God to save her, for he either knew or was informed that she was an unbeliever. He must have thought his son was a believer. As such, he felt compelled to express, in a manner befitting a Prophet, his astonishment that God had let him drown. This is why God replied to him as He did (11:46).

Noah, like every other Prophet, was kind-hearted and caring. Every Prophet sacrificed himself for the good of humanity and made tireless efforts to guide people toward the truth and true happiness in both worlds. Concerning Prophet Muhammad's attitude in this respect, God says: *You would nearly kill yourself following after them, in grief, if they believe not in this Message* (18:6).

Noah appealed to his people for 950 years, never once relenting. It is natural for a Prophet, a father, to show disappointment when he learns that his son is among the unbelievers who have been condemned to punishment in both worlds. But since God is the Most Just and Most Compassionate, Noah immediately turned to Him and sought refuge with Him, lest he should ask Him for that of which he had no knowledge:

O my Lord, I seek refuge with you, lest I should ask
You for that of which I have no knowledge. Unless
You forgive me and have mercy on me, I shall be lost.
(11:47)

Abraham. Abraham, the "intimate friend of God," was one of the greatest Prophets. God's Messenger took pride and pleasure in his connection with him, saying: "I am the one whose coming Abraham prayed for and Jesus gave glad tidings of, and I resemble my forefather Abraham more than anyone else."²²² He was thrown into fire because of his belief

²²² *Muslim*, "Iman," 271.

in One God, and the fire became, by God's Will and Power, coolness and a means of safety for him.

Like all Prophets, Abraham never even thought of worshipping that which was not God. Despite this fact, various erroneous and untrue stories have found their way into some Qur'anic commentaries. They have come from a misunderstanding of the following verses:

When the night covered him over, he saw a star and said: "This is my Lord." But when it set, he said: "I don't love those that set." When he saw the moon rising in splendor, he said: "This is my Lord." But when it set, he said: "Unless my Lord guides me, I surely will be among those who go astray." When he saw the sun rising in splendor, he said: "This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all)." But when the sun set, he said: "O my people, I am free from your ascribing partners to God. I have set my face toward Him Who created the Heavens and the Earth, a man of pure faith and one by nature upright. I am not among those who associate partners with God." (6:76-79)

These verses clearly show that Abraham tried, by way of analogy, to convince his people that no heavenly body could be God. Abraham lived among the Chaldeans of northern Mesopotamia, a people who knew a great deal about heavenly bodies and who worshipped them, along with many other idols. Abraham first argued with his father, telling him that no idol was worthy of worship: *Abraham once said to his father Azar: "Do you take idols for gods? Surely I see you and your people in manifest deviation"* (6:74).

Since Azar was the local idol maker, Abraham began his mission by opposing him. After that, he sought to guide his people to the truth. Since they had a great knowledge of heavenly bodies, God instructed him in such matters and showed him various hidden metaphysical realities so that he might

attain complete certainty in belief and convince his people of their deviation:

So also did We show Abraham the inner dimensions of, and the metaphysical realities behind, the Heavens and the Earth, that he might have certainty. (6:75)

While traveling in mind and heart through heavenly bodies, Abraham began by telling his people that a star could not be God because it sets. Although the superstitious might read fortunes into it or attribute some influence to it, true knowledge shows that it rises and sets according to God's laws, and that its light is extinguished in the broader light of day. So why should anyone worship stars?

His second step in this analogy was to show that the moon, although looking brighter and bigger than a star, could not be God. This is because it sets like a star, changes its shape from hour to hour, and depends on some other heavenly body for its light. At this point, Abraham openly declared that he had been guided by his Lord, and that those who did not worship only Him had gone astray.

Abraham's final analogy showed that the sun could not be worshipped as God, for despite its size and light, it also disappears from sight. Thus, worshipping created phenomena is pure folly. After rejecting the worship of creation, Abraham declared his faith:

I have set my face toward Him Who created the Heavens and the Earth, a man of pure faith and one by nature upright. I am not among those who associate partners with God. (6:79)

So, it is a great mistake to infer from these verses that Abraham took heavenly bodies as God in the early phase of his life.

Abraham's second supposed fault or lapse is that he appealed to God to show him how He revives the dead. Concerning this, the Qur'an says:

Behold! Abraham said: "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." He asked: "Do you not believe?" He said: "Yes, but to set my heart at rest." (2:260)

In a *hadith*, God's Messenger says that 70,000 veils separate God from humanity. This implies that our journey toward God is endless, and that people have different degrees of knowledge and understanding as well as varying capacities for spiritual and intellectual satisfaction. Since God is infinite, unbounded in His Attributes and Names, each individual can obtain only some knowledge of Him and attain some degree of satisfaction (according to his or her capacity).

Abraham had one of the greatest capacities, and therefore needed to increase in knowledge of God every day to attain full spiritual satisfaction. The Prophets, like every other human being, were in a constant process of spiritual and intellectual growth. Considering each previous stage of growth inadequate, they incessantly pursued further degrees of conviction. For this reason, God's Messenger asked God's forgiveness about 100 times a day and frequently entreated Him, saying:

Glory be to You, we have not been able to know You as Your knowledge requires, O Known One! Glory be to You, we have not been able to worship You as Your worship requires, O Worshipped One!

Once Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi met Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi and asked him: "Who is greater: Prophet Muhammad, who says: 'Glory be to You, we have not been able to know You as Your knowledge requires, O Known One,' or Bayazid al-Bistami, who says [in an instance of entranced ecstasy]: 'Glory be to me, how exalted I am!'"

Mawlana's reply also answers those who try to find fault with Abraham: "Both utterances show to what extent our Prophet is greater than Bayazid. Our Prophet's heart or soul was like an ocean, so deep and vast that it could not be satisfied. But Bayazid's soul, in comparison, was like a pitcher—easy to fill and quick to overflow."²²³

To remove any possible doubt of Abraham's conviction, God's Messenger once said: "If Abraham's conviction contained a doubt, we are more liable to doubt than him."²²⁴

Abraham's whole life was a constant struggle against unbelief and polytheism. On only three occasions did he ever use allusions. In other words, he chose to divert his audience's attention to something else by making indirect references to the truth. He did this either to avoid harassment or explain a religious truth in simpler terms. Since, however, some scholars consider these allusions to be lies, we must clarify them here.

The first allusion: When his people wanted him to accompany them to their religious celebration, he cast a glance at the stars and said he was sick.

Abraham was not physically sick, but the grief that he might be associated with his people's falsehoods was preying on his mind and soul. It was impossible for him to worship idols; rather, he was determined to destroy them. Once, to avoid participating in their ceremonies, he told them he was sick and, after they left, smashed their idols. This was not a lie, for he truly was sick of their idols and idolatry. This is why he did what he did. The Qur'an praises him for this:

²²³ Mulla Jami', *Nafahat al-Uns*, 521.

²²⁴ *Bukhari*, "Anbiya'," 11.

Among those who followed Noah's way was Abraham. He came unto his Lord with a pure, sound heart. He said to his father and his people: "What do you worship? Do you desire a falsehood, gods other than God? What, then, is your opinion of the Lord of the Worlds?" Then he cast a glance at the stars, and said: "I am indeed sick!" So they turned away from him and departed. Then he turned to their gods and asked: "Why don't you eat [of the offerings before you]? Why don't you speak?" Then he turned upon them, striking them with might (and breaking them). (37:83-93)

The second allusion: Abraham uses irony to make his point.

As we read in the Qur'an:

We bestowed on Abraham his rectitude before, and were well acquainted with him. He asked his father and his people: "What are these images to which you are (so assiduously) devoted in worship?" They replied: "We found our fathers worshipping them." He said: "Clearly, both you and your fathers have deviated (from the truth)." They said: "Have you brought us the truth, or are you joking with us?" He replied: "No, your Lord is the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth, He who created them. I am a witness [to this truth]. By God, I have a plan for your idols after you go away and turn your backs." So he broke them to pieces, (all) but the biggest, that they might turn to it. They exclaimed: "Who has done this to our gods? He must indeed be some evil-doer!" They said: "We have heard a youth talk of them: Abraham." They replied: "Bring him before the people, that they may bear witness." They asked him: "Did you do this to our gods, Abraham?" He answered: "No. He did it. This is their biggest one. Ask them, if they can speak!" (21:51-63)

Some consider Abraham's final reply to be a lie. The truth is, it is an example of biting irony. Abraham wanted his

people to understand that things that cannot speak or do them any harm or good are unworthy of worship. He was so successful in this attempt that his people, unable to refute his reasoning, could find no way to protect their idols other than by throwing him into the fire.

Abraham did not say that the idols had been broken by the biggest one. Look at his answer carefully. He said: "He did it," and then stopped—there is a significant stop in the reading of the verse—and then continued: "This is their biggest one!" Therefore, the phrase *He did it* alludes to the one who broke the idols, but diverted the audience's attention to the biggest one with: *This is their biggest one!*

Once, God's Messenger told an old woman that old people will not enter Paradise. When he saw that his words distressed her greatly, he clarified the irony: "Because they will enter it as young people."²²⁵ This is, in a way, similar to what Abraham did and so is not a lie.

The third allusion: Abraham and his wife Sarah.

In a *hadith*, and also in the Bible (Genesis 20:2-14), we read that Abraham wanted his wife Sarah to reply to those who asked that she was his sister, not his wife.²²⁶ According to the Bible, Abraham did this because he would have been killed if her true identity were known. This is not a lie, for as declared in the Qur'an, all believers are brothers or sisters to each other.

In conclusion, Abraham never lied. If he had done so, he would have been reproached by God. However, the Qur'an never mentions that God reproached him for lying. On the

²²⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Shama'il*, 84-85.

²²⁶ *Bukhari*, "Anbiya'," 8; *Muslim*, "Fada'il," 154.

contrary, his allusions are mentioned where God praises him in the Qur'an. For this reason, the Prophetic Tradition about those allusions should not be treated literally.

Abraham's supposed lapse

Abraham began his mission by calling upon his father Azar, the local idol maker, to abandon idolatry and turn toward God, the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth. When his father refused to do so, he left him, saying that he would ask God to forgive him. He kept his promise: *Forgive my father, for he is one of those who go astray* (26:86).

Some consider this a lapse, for after all his father was an unbeliever. However, it is difficult to regard it as a lapse, for Abraham was a Prophet deputed by God to call people to the truth and salvation. Like every Prophet, it grieved him to see any of God's servants not following His way to happiness and salvation in both worlds. We can discern in the following verses just how much he desired his father to be guided:

(Also) mention in the Book (the story of) Abraham: He was a man of truth, a Prophet. He asked his father: "My father, why do you worship that which cannot hear or see, and which cannot benefit you? There has come to me that knowledge which has not reached you, so follow me. I will guide you to a straight, even way. Don't serve Satan, for Satan is a rebel against the Most Merciful. O father, I fear lest a penalty afflict you from the Most Merciful, so that you become a friend to Satan." (19:41-45)

It was Abraham's duty to call people to worship God, despite their persistent rejection. Although the Qur'an openly stated that: *As to those who do not believe, it is the same to them whether you warn them or not, for they will not believe* (2:6), God's Messenger never gave up warning them. Besides calling his father to the truth, Abraham prayed for him until,

as stated in the Qur'an, he realized that his father was an enemy of God. When he was convinced of this fact, he dissociated himself from him. God mentions this not as a lapse on Abraham's part, but as a virtue, saying: *For Abraham was most tender-hearted, forbearing* (9:114).

God also mentions Abraham's conduct as an excellent example to follow:

There is for you an excellent example (to follow) in Abraham and those with him. They said to their people: "We are free of you and whatever you worship besides God. We have rejected you, and there has arisen enmity and hatred forever between us and you, unless you believe in God and Him alone." But Abraham said to his father: "I will pray for forgiveness for you, although I have no power (to get) anything on your behalf from God." Our Lord! In You we have put our trust, and to You we turn in repentance; to You is the final return. (60:4)

As indicated above, Abraham prayed for his father's forgiveness because he had promised to do so (9:114). When he saw that his father was determined to persist in his unbelief, he dissociated himself from him and no longer sought his forgiveness.

Finally, it should be noted here that some Qur'anic interpreters do not consider Azar to be Abraham's father. Although it is not a defect on the part of Abraham to descend from an unbelieving father, for *God Almighty brings forth the living out of the dead, and brings forth the dead out of the living* (3:27), the Qur'an always uses the word *ab* (which in addition to father can mean *uncle, step-father, foster-father, or grandfather*) for Azar.

Although he was told not to seek forgiveness for Azar, the Qur'an mentions that in his old age he prayed: *Our Lord,*

forgive me, my parents, and all believers on the day that the Reckoning will be established (14:41). In this prayer, he uses *walid* (the one who begot him) for father. It is therefore quite possible that Azar was not the one who begot him. According to the Bible, Abraham's real father was Terah. However, God knows best.

Joseph. Prophet Joseph is exalted in the Qur'an as an example of chastity. In his childhood, his envious brothers threw him down a well and left him there. A passing caravan found him and later sold him as a slave to a high official (probably a minister) of the Egyptian court. The Bible gives his name as Potiphar Genesis 37:36).

Joseph came from a family of Prophets. When someone told God's Messenger that he was a noble man, the Messenger alluded to this fact, saying: "The noble one, son of a noble one who is the son of a noble one who is the son of a noble one. This is Joseph, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham, the intimate friend of God."²²⁷ Joseph was still a child in the well, when God revealed to him that he *would one day tell his brothers the truth of what they had done* (12:15). Therefore, from the beginning he was protected from all vice.

Joseph, an exceptionally handsome young man, soon came to the attention of his master's wife. Eventually, she fell in love with him. In the words of the ladies of the capital city, quoted by the Qur'an, Joseph *inspired her with passionate love* (12:30). She tried to seduce him by locking the doors and calling him to come to her. But Joseph, having been given knowledge, sound judgment, and discernment by God, replied immediately: *God forbid! Truly my Lord has treated me honorably. Assuredly, wrongdoers never prosper* (12:23).

²²⁷ Bukhari, "Anbiya'," 21:19; Ibn Hanbal, 2:96, 332.

Prophet Joseph had attained the rank of *ihsan*, which God's Messenger describes as the believer's ability to worship as if seeing God in front of him or her. In other words, at every instant he was aware of God watching him. He also was one whom God had made sincere, pure-hearted, and of pure intention. Therefore, it is inconceivable that he would betray God's blessings by succumbing to this temptation. If he had taken only one step in this direction, he would have become a wrongdoer. Or, if by "my lord" he meant his master, he would have been a wrongdoer if he had violated his master's trust.

While narrating the rest of the story, the Qur'an says:

Certainly, she burnt inwardly because of him; and he burnt inwardly because of her until he saw the evidence of his Lord: thus We did that we might turn away from him all evil and shameful deeds. For he was one of Our servants, made beforehand sincere and pure. (12:24)

Unfortunately, the sentence translated here as *she burnt inwardly because of him; and he burnt inwardly because of her until he saw the evidence of his Lord*, has been misunderstood by some interpreters of the Qur'an to mean "she desired, and was moved toward him; and he desired, and was moved toward her, but just at that point he saw the evidence of his Lord and stopped." Some have embellished *the evidence of his Lord* with such flights of fancy as Jacob appearing with his hand on his lips and saving his son from a grave sin.

More than a misunderstanding, this is a slander against a Prophet who was honored and presented by God as "a most excellent model of chastity," and by God's Messenger as the noblest of all. To remove all such doubts, we will analyze *hamma*, which we have translated literally as "to burn inwardly," for this word has confused some interpreters.

Hamma literally means “to suffer, burn, be troubled inwardly, and be consumed with passion and longing.” There is a principle in the sciences of morphology and semantics that the first and most common meaning of a word is preferred, unless an inconsistency or inconformity appears in the context. This principle, together with two other principles to be explained below, make it impossible to take *hamma* in its first meaning:

One: Joseph and this lady were worlds apart with respect to their beliefs, ambitions, characters, and ways of life. Therefore, each had his or her own suffering and anxiety, and each was consumed with completely different ambitions.

Two: The verse containing *hamma* is a parenthetical one explaining the virtue of belief and sincerity, which bring God’s special favor and protection. It is not there merely as a part of the story. It also should be noted that there are stops after each phrase, which shows that they do not link a chain of events, but rather express three different realities. In this case, the exact meaning of the verse is as follows:

She was burning inwardly because of her love for Joseph. This love got Joseph into great trouble; his chastity, good character and reputation might have been damaged. He had to escape this situation. At this juncture, God’s evidence (His protection or something else) came to his aid and turned all evil away from him, for God already had made him one of His sincere and pure servants. He was not *mukhlis* (one purified and sincere due to self-discipline and spiritual training), but rather a *mukhlas* (one made by God sincere and pure).

Moreover, the verb *hamma* in this context does not indicate the beginning of an action, for we read in the previous verse that she already had started the action: *she locked the door and called Joseph to come to her* (12:23). But Joseph

refused. So, to say that *hamma* has the meaning of “to start toward” for both Joseph and the woman contradicts the previous verse, as well as the next one: *So they both hurried to the door, and she tore the shirt from his back* (12:25). It is clear that Joseph ran to the door to escape, that she ran after him to catch him, and that she tore the shirt from his back.

Some, however, suggest that she desired Joseph and that he might have desired her if he had not seen his Lord’s evidence. Since he had been protected from the beginning against sin, he could not have any desire for her. In either case, he neither felt something for her nor start toward her. Like every other Prophet, Joseph was infallible.

Muhammad. God’s Messenger is superior to all other Prophets. This could not be otherwise, for he was sent as a mercy to all the worlds. The religion he relayed includes all essential tenets of the previously revealed religions as well as everything necessary to solve all human problems until the Last Day. In contrast, all earlier Prophets were sent to certain people and for a limited period.

Prophet Muhammad, in the words of Busiri: “...is the sun of virtues and the others are, in comparison to him, stars diffusing light for people at night.” When the sun rises, both the moon and stars are no longer visible. Likewise, when the “Sun of Prophethood” (Prophet Muhammad rose to illuminate all the universe, starlight became unnecessary.

Like his predecessors, Prophet Muhammad was infallible. We see both in the Qur’an and history books that, although his enemies slandered him relentlessly, they never questioned his honesty and infallibility.

They said he was “mad”—he madly loved God and, again, madly desired and sought for the people to be guided.

Thus he was “mad,” but not in the sense of being crazy. They said he was a “magician” who charmed people—he did charm them, but with his personality, as well as with Islam and the Qur’an, both of which he brought from God. But he was not a magician. They said he was a “soothsayer”—he made hundreds of predictions, most of which have already come true and the others waiting to be proven. But he was not a soothsayer.

Like the already discussed Qur’anic expressions that, superficially, seem to cast doubt on the infallibility of some of the Prophets, there are several admonitions in the Qur’an regarding some actions of God’s Messenger. Before analyzing them, however, we must remember that Prophets, like great jurists, also exercised their personal reason if no explicit or implicit ruling concerning the matter in question had been revealed.

Just as the Prophet’s wives are not the same as other Muslim women with respect to reward and Divine punishment (see 33:30-32), God does not treat Prophets as He does other believers. For example, He admonished them when they drank water from Zamzam (a well in Makka) instead of from Kawthar (a fountain in Paradise). Such admonitions should never be regarded as the result of sin. Furthermore, these admonitions usually are really Divine compliments that show the greatness of Prophets and their nearness to God.

- *God’s Messenger and the prisoners taken during the Battle of Badr*

The small Muslim community of Makka was subjected to the most brutal tortures. Its members bore them patiently and never thought of retaliation, for the Qur’an ordered God’s Messenger to call unbelievers with wisdom and fair preaching, to repel evil with what was better, and to forgive their

faults and evil deeds. When the Muslims emigrated to Madina to live according to Islamic principles, they left everything behind. However, they continued to be harassed in Madina by both Makkan polytheists as well as a new group: Madina's Jewish tribes. Moreover, even though the Ansar (the Helpers) willingly shared all their possessions with the Emigrants, all Muslims experienced deprivation. In such straitened circumstances and because they had been wronged, God permitted them to resist the enemy onslaught. This was just before the Battle of Badr.

This battle was the Muslims' first military confrontation with the enemy forces. Although outnumbered, the believers won a great victory. Until then, if we do not accept the opinions of some Qur'anic interpreters that *Surah Muhammad*, which contains regulations on treating prisoners of war, was revealed before *Surat al-Anfal*, no Divine commandment had been revealed on how to treat captives. Muslims did not know if they were to kill enemy soldiers or take them as prisoners. Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, for example, was not pleased when he saw fellow Muslims taking prisoners; he was in favor of killing them in the first confrontation.

After the battle, the Prophet consulted with his Companions, as he always did where there was no specific Revelation, on how to treat the prisoners. Abu Bakr said: "O God's Messenger, they are your people. Even though they have wronged you and the believers greatly, you will win their hearts and cause their guidance if you forgive them and please them."

'Umar had a different idea. He said: "O God's Messenger, these prisoners are the leading figures of Makka. If we kill them, unbelief will no longer be strong enough to fight us again. Hand each prisoner over to his Muslim relative. Let

‘Ali kill his brother ‘Aqil. Let Abu Bakr kill his son ‘Abd al-Rahman. Let me kill my relative so and so.”

God’s Messenger turned to Abu Bakr and said: “You are like Abraham, who said: *He who follows me is of me, and he who disobeys me—but You are indeed Oft-Forgiving, Most Compassionate* (14:36). You are also like Jesus, who said: *If You punish them, they are Your servants. If You forgive them, You are All-Mighty, All-Wise* (5:118). Then he turned to ‘Umar and said: “You are like Noah, who said: *O my Lord, don’t leave even one unbeliever on Earth*” (71:26). You are also like Moses, who said: *Our Lord, destroy their (Pharaoh’s and his chiefs’) riches and harden their hearts so they will not believe until they see the painful chastisement* (10:88). He followed Abu Bakr’s advice.²²⁸

Every Prophet was sent to guide people to the way of God, and the mission of each was based on mercy. However, mercy sometimes requires, as in the case of Noah and Moses amputating an arm to ensure the body’s health, or even that the body should undergo a major operation. Islam, being the middle way of absolute balance between all temporal and spiritual extremes and containing the ways of all previous Prophets, makes a choice according to the situation.

Prior to Badr, the Muslims were weak, whereas their enemies, in material terms, were strong, formidable, and organized. Thus, conditions may have required that *the Prophet should not have had prisoners of war until he became completely triumphant in the land* (8:67), for they were fighting for the cause of God, not for some worldly purpose. However, God Almighty already had decreed that ransom and spoils of war would be lawful for Muslims. The pure hearts of the

²²⁸ *Qurtubi*, “Tafsir,” 8:31; *Ibn Hanbal*, 1:383.

Prophet and Abu Bakr must have felt that God would allow them to take spoils of war and ransom prisoners. Therefore, they released the prisoners in return for some ransom before the relevant verses were revealed:

Had it not been for that decree, a severe penalty would have reached them for the ransom that they took. But if God made it lawful, they could enjoy what they took in war, lawful and good. (8:68-69)

This is mentioned more explicitly in another verse:

When you confront the unbelievers (in battle), smite their necks. When you have thoroughly subdued them, bind them firmly. Thereafter (it is time for) either generosity (release without ransom) or ransom (recommended). (47:4)

To conclude, the Muslims did not disobey a Divine commandment that had been revealed already, and so they did not sin. already It was a decision reached after consultation.

- *The Prophet's exempting the Hypocrites from the expedition of Tabuk*

The expedition of Tabuk took place in 9 AH (after hijra) during the summer, when Arabia's heat is intense. The soldiers were sent to face Byzantium, one of the two local superpowers. Against his custom, God's Messenger announced the expedition's target. Some people asked to be excused, and God's Messenger excused those whose excuses he regarded as justifiable. He did not check to see whether they were telling the truth for, as a Muslim, he had to judge according to outward signs and the affirmation of faith.²²⁹

²²⁹ He could not make them reveal their real reasons. This is why hypocrites, who are outwardly Muslims but inwardly unbelievers, are treated as Muslims in a Muslim society. There were many such people in Madina during the Prophet's time. The Prophet never disclosed their identities.

Besides, as God veils people's shortcomings, God's Messenger never reproached people directly. When he discerned a defect in an individual or a fault common in his community, he would mount the pulpit and give a general warning. He never mentioned any names.

Many hypocrites offered bogus excuses. Despite this, God's Messenger accepted their excuses. In this case: *God forgive you! Why did you grant them exemption until those who told the truth were manifest to you, and you knew the liars?* (9:43) was revealed.

Although some scholars hold that God reproached His Messenger for exempting the Hypocrites, the truth is the reverse. Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and many others, among whom are linguists, have correctly pointed out that *God forgive you!* is an exclamation, [like *God bless you!* in English.] So, the true meaning of the expression is *God give you grace!* As explained earlier, it is not necessary for a sin to exist before forgiveness is granted. For example, as we saw in verses 4:99, 5:3, and 4:43, forgiveness may be juxtaposed with grace, for their meanings are closely allied.²³⁰

In addition, God's Messenger was motivated by kindness as well as policy: kindness because, in the urgency of the moment, he did not wish to refuse those who had real excuses; and policy, because those who were there just because they were obligated to be there would be a burden and a source of disorder. This is stated explicitly:

If they had gone forth with you, they would have added nothing but mischief; they would have hurried through your ranks, seeking to cause sedition among you.
(9:47)

²³⁰ Qurtubi, 8:98-99; Fakhr al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, 16:73-74.

God's Messenger knew who the Hypocrites were: *Surely you will know them by the tone of their speech* (47:30). In addition, God did not will that they should set out for war:

If they had intended to go forth they would certainly have made some preparation therefor; but God was averse to their being sent forth; so He made them lag behind, and they were told: "Sit among those who sit (inactive)." (9:46)

That being so, the meaning of the verse in question is this: "God give you grace! If you had not excused them when they asked, the Hypocrites would have been clearly distinguished from the truthful." As we can see, the Prophet is not being reprimanded; rather, the verse expresses a Divine compliment and affection for him.

- *Surat al-'Abasa (He Frowned)*

Prophethood is not just another job that anyone can do. Each person has two aspects: heavenly and earthly. We are shaped from dust and created from a lowly drop of "water," but nevertheless have been distinguished with the "breath of God." As a result, we can rise (or fall) to infinitely high (or low) levels. All Prophets were of the highest rank. God chose them and endowed them with all laudable virtues and the highest degree of intellectual and spiritual faculties.

To catch just a glimpse of the greatness of God's Messenger we should consider how, by God's Will and Power, he transformed a savage and backward desert people into the founders of the most magnificent civilization in human history. In addition, according to the rule that "one who causes something is like its doer," the reward of each believer's deeds, from the time of the Prophet to the Last Day, is added to the Prophet's reward, which causes him to grow in spirit incessantly.

Despite this, some classical Qur'anic commentaries and the like contain assertions based on borrowings or unreliable anecdotes incompatible with Prophethood. What is more tragic is that in the Muslim world itself, "researchers" influenced by either Orientalists or worldly temptations, have been less-than-respectful toward Prophethood, God's Messenger, and the Sunna. Deceived into mistaking "the sun's reflection for the sun itself," they regard themselves as free to criticize the Prophet and his Sunna. One of their pretexts is the initial verses of *Surat al-'Abasa*:

He frowned and turned away because there came to him the blind man. But how can you know? Perhaps he might purify himself or be forewarned, and warning might profit him. As for him who regards himself as self-sufficient, to him you eagerly attend, though it is not your concern if he does not purify himself. But as for him who eagerly hastens to you, and is in fear [of God], you are heedless of him. (80:1-10)

According to what some Qur'anic interpreters have written, God's Messenger was once deeply and earnestly engaged in conveying the Message to pagan Qurayshi leaders when he was interrupted by a blind man. This man, 'Abd Allah ibn Umm Maktum, was so poor that usually no one took any notice of him. He desired to benefit from the teaching of God's Messenger, but the latter disliked the interruption and became impatient. As a result, these verses were revealed to reproach the Prophet.

This story is, however, highly questionable for several reasons:

- The narration of the event and its participants are not the same in all reliable Tradition books as in some Qur'anic commentaries. In total, the various accounts mention seven people in addition to Ibn Umm Maktum.

- Several verses explain how previous Prophets behaved toward poor people. It is inconceivable for a Prophet who always advised his followers to be with poor people to frown at or turn away from a poor blind man, especially when he came to listen to him.
- God's Messenger always rejected the calls of Qurayshi leaders to drive away the poor Muslims if he wanted them to believe in Islam.
- The Qur'an attaches great importance to how a believer behaves in the presence of God's Messenger. For example, they are "not to depart without asking for his leave when they are with him." They cannot enter his house without permission, will have their deeds reduced to nothing if they raise their voices above his, and will be punished in Hell if they ill-treat him. Given this, Ibn Umm Maktum should have been reprimanded for interrupting God's Messenger.
- Ibn Umm Maktum was the son of Khadija's uncle, and one of those who accepted Islam in its early days. He had a remarkable position in Islam. God's Messenger deputed to him the government of Madina twice while he was on military campaign. So, despite his blindness, he could not have been so rude as to interrupt God's Messenger while the latter was inviting the Qurayshi leaders to the truth. He was blind, not deaf.
- The reprimand contained in the relevant verses is too severe to be for the Prophet. The verbs *to frown* and *to turn away from* are never used in the Qur'an for a Prophet; in fact, they are not even used for ordinary believers. In this verse, they are used in their third person, singular form. In the absence of the Prophet, this means disrespect and debasement. Also, the following expressions are of the type used for the leaders of the

unbelievers. Therefore, it is inconceivable that the target of this reprimand was the Prophet.

- The Qur'anic interpreters who mention this incident add to it that whenever God's Messenger saw Ibn Umm Maktum afterwards, he would say to him: "Greetings to you, O one because of whom my Lord admonished me." This addition is not to be found in reliable books of Tradition.
- God's Messenger was very kind-hearted and gave all he had to bring his people to guidance. The Qur'an states: *It grieves him that the believers should perish. He is ardently anxious over them, and most kind and merciful to them* (9:128).

After all these explanations, we choose to refer the truth of the matter to God, who is the All-Knowing.

• *The offer made by the Thaqif tribe*

Before entering Islam, the Thaqif tribe tried to get some concessions from the Prophet, including some exemptions from various religious duties—as if the Messenger were authorized to do so! As even an ordinary Muslim would never think of granting such a request, imagine the Prophet's reaction! The verses revealed concerning this incident say:

They sought to entice you from what we reveal unto you, to substitute against Us something different. Then, they would certainly have made you a trusted friend! Indeed, had We not given you strength and firmness, you might nearly have inclined to them a little. Then, We should have made you taste double (punishment) in this life, and double in death; and moreover you would have found none for you to help you against Us. (17:73-75)

First, God's Messenger is the direct addressee and receiver of the Divine Revelation. For this reason, God directly

addresses him concerning collective and individual orders, prohibitions, and responsibilities. This does not mean that God's Messenger sometimes ignored what he was told to do. Being the embodiment, representative, and preacher of Islam, as well as the best example, God's Messenger practiced them most strictly and experienced the "whole history of Islam" in miniature measure.

God used him, his time, and his Companions as a pattern according to which the future expansion of Islam would be shaped. He functioned as a seed from which all future Islamic civilizations, movements, and sciences—the universal tree of Islam—would grow. For this reason, such verses should never be taken to suggest that God's Messenger was reproached for doing something wrong. That blessed person, the Beloved of God and for whose sake God created all the worlds, is absolutely free of defect, fault, and shortcoming.

God's Messenger was extremely eager for the guidance of all people. To have some understanding of his love and affection for humanity and existence in general, reflect on what a contemporary Muslim saintly scholar said concerning his eagerness for the guidance and well-being of his nation:

I have known nothing of worldly pleasures in my life of over eighty years. All my life has passed on battlefields, and at various other places of suffering. There has been no torment which I have not tasted and no oppression which I have not suffered. I care for neither Paradise nor fear Hell. If I witness that the faith of my nation (that is, all the Muslim peoples) has been secured, I will have no objection to being burnt in the flames of Hell, for my heart will change into a rose garden while my body is being burnt.²³¹

²³¹ Said Nursi, *Eptiomes of Light* (Mathnawi al-Nuriya) (Izmir, Kaynak: 1999), II.

God said to His Messenger, consoling him in the face of persistent unbelief: *You will nearly grieve yourself to death, following after them, if they don't believe in this Message* (18:6).

Having seen the eagerness of God's Messenger to guide people, the Thaqifi leaders tried to extract special concessions. They even added that if others objected, he might excuse it with the lie that his Lord had ordered him to do so. From a purely human point of view, it may seem good policy to make a small concession to fulfill a great mission. But the Messenger was not the author of Islam; his only responsibility was to convey it. The religion belongs to God. The verses in question emphasize this point.

- *His marriage to Zaynab*

During the pre-Islamic period, and still today, cultural, economic, and spiritual slavery was widespread. Islam came to destroy such slavery and sought to solve this social, as well as psychological, problem in stages. Since slavery has a deep psychological aspect, its abolition all at once could have resulted in even harsher conditions. For example, when Lincoln abolished slavery in the United States, most slaves had to return to their owners because their ability to assume responsibility, to choose, and to manage their affairs as free people had been beaten out of them or had caused their leaders to be murdered.

Islam established, as a first step, strict principles on how to treat slaves, as seen in the following *hadiths*: "Those who kill their slaves will be killed. Those who imprison and starve their slaves will be imprisoned and starved. Those who castrate their slaves will be castrated,"²³² and "Arabs are not

²³² *Abu Dawud*, "Diyat," 70; *Tirmidhi*, "Diyat," 17.

superior to non-Arabs; non-Arabs are not superior to Arabs. White people are not superior to black people; black people are not superior to white people. Superiority is only in righteousness and fear of God.”²³³

As its second step, Islam enabled slaves to realize their human consciousness and identity. It educated them in Islamic values, and implanted in them a love of freedom. On the day of their emancipation, they were fully equipped to be useful members of the community as farmers, artisans, teachers, scholars, commanders, governors, ministers, and even prime ministers.

Another pre-Islamic practice, which still exists in the civil law codes of many contemporary countries, is allowing adopted children to enjoy the same legal status as natural children. As a result, a father could not legally marry his adopted son's widow or divorced wife. This practice was to be abolished, for neither adoption nor any other method of declaring someone a son can create a relationship comparable to that between children and their natural parents.

Zayd was a black African who had been kidnapped and enslaved as a child. Khadija, the first wife of God's Messenger, had purchased him in the Makkan slave market. After she married the Prophet, she gave Zayd to him as a gift. God's Messenger emancipated him and called him "my son." When Zayd's parents finally located him and came to Makka to get him, he refused to go with them, saying that he would rather stay with God's Messenger.

In order to show the equality between black and white people and demonstrate that superiority lies in righteousness and devotion to God, not in descent and worldly position,

²³³ Ibn Hanbal, 411.

God's Messenger married Zayd to Zaynab bint Jahsh of the Hashimite tribe. She was a very devoted and intellectual Muslim woman and had a noble character. God's Messenger had known her very well since her childhood. Although her family had wanted her to marry God's Messenger, they agreed to let her marry Zayd because God's Messenger desired it.

Zayd, however, admitted that he was spiritually inferior to his wife. He realized through his insight that her sublimity of character made her fit to be the wife of a far greater man than himself. He asked God's Messenger many times to allow him to divorce her, but each time God's Messenger advised him to remain married to her. Nevertheless, Zayd concluded that he was not his wife's equal and eventually divorced her.

After this, God told His Messenger to marry her, even though this would violate his society's norms. But as this marriage had been ordained in heaven, he submitted and married Zaynab:

When Zayd had dissolved (his marriage) with her, We gave her in marriage to you, so that there may be no difficulty and sin for believers in marriage with the wives of their adopted sons if they divorce them. And God's command must be fulfilled. (33:37)

Although this marriage was very difficult for God's Messenger to enter into, God used it to abolish a mistaken custom and establish a new law and custom. The Messenger always was the first to practice the law or rule to be established and obeyed, so that it would have enough influence on others. His marriage to Zaynab was one of the most difficult commandments he had to carry out. That is why his wife 'A'isha remarked: "If the Messenger of God been inclined to suppress anything of what was revealed to him, he would surely have suppressed this verse."

As expected, the enemies of Islam and the Hypocrites slandered God's Messenger. Although some of their allegations have found their way into various Qur'anic commentaries, no such allegation or slander has ever affected—or will affect—his pure personality and chastity. All scholars agree that he lived happily with Khadija, a widow 15 years older than himself, with nothing to suggest any misconduct during their 25-year marriage (ending only with Khadija's death). Unlike young people, he did not burn with lust and carnal desires. This clearly shows that his subsequent marriages, which took place after he was 50 years old, a time when desire has subsided, were entered into for specific purposes.

In sum, like every other Prophet, God's Messenger has no blemish and is innocent of what they accuse him. Nor can his infallibility be doubted.

No bodily or mental defects

All Muslim theologians agree that Prophets have no bodily or mental defects. As they were extraordinarily attractive in personality and conduct, they were also graceful and charming in outward appearance. They were perfect in bodily structure, handsome, and well-built.

Anas says that God's Messenger was the most handsome of people. Jabir ibn Samura remarks: "Once during a full moon, we were sitting in the mosque. God's Messenger came in. I looked first at the shining moon, and then at his face. I swear by God that his face was brighter than the moon."²³⁴

Prophets must be free from all bodily defects, for their appearance should not repel others. In explaining the Divine

²³⁴ Suyuti, *Al-Khasa'is al-Kubra*, 1:123; Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummal*, 7:168.

wisdom of God's Messenger living for 63 years, Said Nursi writes:

Believers are religiously obliged to love and respect God's Messenger to the utmost degree, and follow his every command without feeling any dislike for any aspect of him. For this reason, God did not allow him to live to the troublesome and often humiliating period of old age, and sent him to the "highest abode" when he was 63 years old. This was the average lifespan of the members of his community, thus making him the example in this respect also.²³⁵

Job's afflictions

Despite this characteristic being common to all Prophets, false stories about Job and Moses, either borrowed from Israelite sources or misunderstandings of Qur'anic verses, have found their way into Qur'anic commentaries.

In a *hadith*, God's Messenger says: "The Prophets undergo the severest trials; the greatest misfortunes strike them. Then come other believers; the firmer their belief, the bigger their misfortune." Prophet Job is praised in the Qur'an as a *steadfast, excellent servant of God, one ever-turning to his Lord* (38:44). As can be deduced from the Qur'anic verses, and mentioned in the Bible, he was afflicted with a skin disease, which caused painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head (Job 2:7). Influenced by Israelite stories, some Qur'anic commentators have added that worms lived in his sores or abscesses, and that the resulting offensive odor caused people to leave him.

These additions are completely groundless. If people really left him, this might have been due to his later poverty. In the beginning, Job was a rich, thankful servant of God;

²³⁵ Nursi, *The Letters*, 2:84-85.

later on, he lost his wealth and children. As a Prophet, he could not have had a repulsive or disgusting appearance, with, at least, his face exempt from sores. Nor could his body have emitted an offensive smell.

Contrary to the Biblical account that he cursed the day of his birth (Job 3:1) and God openly (Job 7:20-21), and justified himself rather than God (Job 32:2), Job bore his afflictions for years without any objection. He prayed: *Affliction has visited me, and You are the Most Merciful of the Merciful* (21:83). God answered his prayer and removed his affliction, and restored to him his household and the like thereof along with them (21:84).

Moses' speech impediment

The Qur'an states that Moses, on receiving the order to go to Pharaoh, supplicated: *My Lord, open my breast (relieve my mind and enable me to bear everything), and ease for me my task. Loosen a knot upon my tongue so that they may understand my words* (20:25-28). Some commentators, influenced by Israelite sources and misunderstanding Moses' supplication, have asserted that he had a speech impediment. They say that a young Moses once pulled Pharaoh's beard. Angered, Pharaoh wanted to have him killed. But his wife, trying to save the child, asked Pharaoh to test him to see whether he was fit to be judged or decide in his favor. Bringing a weighing scale, she put a piece of gold in one pan and some embers in the other. Moses put the embers in his mouth, which gave him a permanent stutter. So, according to these interpretations, Moses was asking God to remove his stutter.

An invented story cannot serve as the basis for interpreting a Qur'anic verse. If Moses had had such a speech impediment, he should have prayed for *the* knot—not *a* knot—to be loosened. What Moses was asking for was a greater ability to

articulate God's Message in Pharaoh's presence, for he was not as eloquent as his brother Aaron (28:34; Exodus 4:10).

In conclusion, all Prophets were both physically and mentally perfect. Regardless of what others might claim, there is nothing in their lives to suggest even the slightest defect. However, some of them may have been superior to others in certain respects: *And those Messengers, some We have preferred above others; some there are to whom God spoke [directly], and some He raised in rank* (2:253). Prophet Muhammad is superior to all of them by virtue of being the last Prophet sent to both humanity and jinn. His Mission was not restricted to a certain people or a certain time; rather, it was directed toward all people and remains valid until the end of time.

CHAPTER 5

Prophet Muhammad as Husband and Father

The Prophet and his wives

Prophet Muhammad personifies the roles of perfect father and husband. He was so kind and tolerant with his wives that they could not envisage their lives without him, nor did they want to live away from him.

He married Sawda, his second wife, while in Makka. After a while, he wanted to divorce her for certain reasons. She was extremely upset at this news, and implored him: “O Messenger of God, I wish no worldly thing of you. I will sacrifice the time allocated to me, if you don’t want to visit me. But please don’t deprive me of being your wife. I want to go to the Hereafter as your wife. I care for nothing else.”²³⁶ The Messenger did not divorce her, nor did he stop visiting her.²³⁷

²³⁶ The reason was not specified in sources. However, there were rare debates among his wives because of jealousy, which might have caused them to speak to him improperly. Another reason may be that it was rare for them to ask the Prophet for something that he could not procure. There was not the least record that something happened between the Prophet and his wives because of sexual reasons. Visiting was not restricted to sexual relations. He may have been offended at her behavior in her room.

²³⁷ *Muslim*, “Rada’,” 47.

Once he noticed that Hafsa was uncomfortable over their financial situation. "If she wishes, I may set her free," he said, or something to that effect. This suggestion so alarmed her that she requested mediators to persuade him not to do so. He kept his faithful friends daughter as his trusted wife.

His wives viewed separation from the Messenger of God as a calamity, so firmly had he established himself in their hearts. They were completely at one with him. They shared in his blessed, mild, and natural life. If he had left them, they would have died of despair. If he had divorced one of them, she would have waited at his doorstep until the Last Day.

After his death, there was much yearning and a great deal of grief. Abu Bakr and 'Umar found the Messengers wives weeping whenever they visited them. Their weeping seemed to continue for the rest of their lives. Muhammad left a lasting impression on everyone. At one point, he had nine wives and dealt equally with all of them and without any serious problems. He was a kind and gentle husband, and never behaved harshly or rudely. In short, he was the perfect husband.

A few days before his death, he said: "A servant has been allowed to choose this world or his Lord. He chose his Lord."²³⁸ Abu Bakr, a man of great intelligence, began to cry, understanding that the Prophet was talking about himself. His illness worsened daily, and his severe headache caused him to writhe in pain. But even during this difficult period, he continued to treat his wives with kindness and gentleness. He asked for permission to stay in one room, as he had no strength to visit them one by one. His wives agreed, and the Messenger spent his last days in Aisha's room.

²³⁸ *Bukhari*, "Salat," 80.

Each wife, because of his generosity and kindness, thought she was his most beloved. The idea that any man could show complete equality and fairness in his relationships with nine women seems impossible. For this reason, the Messenger of God asked God's pardon for any unintentional leanings. He would pray: "I may have unintentionally shown more love to one of them than the others, and this would be injustice. So, O Lord, I take refuge in Your grace for those things beyond my power."²³⁹

What gentleness and sensitivity! I wonder if anyone else could show such kindness to his children or spouses. When people manage to cover up their lower inborn tendencies, it is as if they have done something very clever and shown tremendous willpower. But they sometimes expose these very defects unconsciously while bragging of their cleverness. The Messenger, despite showing no fault, sought only God's forgiveness.

His gentleness penetrated his wives souls so deeply that his departure led to what they must have felt to be an unbridgeable separation. They did not commit suicide, as Islam forbids it, but their lives now became full of endless sorrow and ceaseless tears.

The Messenger was kind and gentle to all women, and advised all other men to follow him in this regard. Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas described his kindness as follows:

'Umar said: One day I went to the Prophet and saw him smiling. "May God make you smile forever, O Messenger of God," I said, and asked why he was smiling. "I smile at those women. They were chatting in front of me before you came. When they heard your

²³⁹ *Tirmidhi*, "Nikah," 41:4; *Bukhari*, "Adab," 68.

voice, they all vanished," he answered still smiling. On hearing this answer, I raised my voice and told them: "O enemies of your own selves, you are scared of me, but you are not scared of the Messenger of God, and you don't show respect to him." "You are hard-hearted and strict," they replied.²⁴⁰

'Umar also was gentle to women. However, the most handsome man looks ugly when compared to Joseph's beauty. Likewise, 'Umar's gentleness and sensitivity seem like violence and severity when compared to those of the Prophet. The women had seen the Messengers gentleness, sensitivity, and kindness, and so regarded 'Umar as strict and severe. Yet 'Umar shouldered the caliphate perfectly and became one of the greatest examples after the Prophet. He was a just ruler, and strove to distinguish right from wrong. His qualities enabled him to be caliph. Some of his qualities might seem rather severe; however, those very qualities enabled him to shoulder very demanding responsibilities.

The Prophet's consultation with his wives. The Messenger discussed matters with his wives as friends. Certainly he did not need their advice, since he was directed by Revelation. However, he wanted to teach his nation that Muslim men were to give women every consideration. This was quite a radical idea in his time, as it is today in many parts of the world. He began teaching his people through his own relationship with his wives.

For example, the conditions laid down in the Treaty of Hudaibiya disappointed and enraged many Muslims, for one condition stipulated that they could not make the pilgrimage that year. They wanted to reject the treaty, continue on to Makka, and face the possible consequences. But the

²⁴⁰ Bukhari, "Adab," 68.

Messenger ordered them to slaughter their sacrificial animals and take off their pilgrim attire. Some Companions hesitated, hoping that he would change his mind. He repeated his order, but they continued to hesitate. They did not oppose him; rather, they still hoped he might change his mind, for they had set out with the intention of pilgrimage and did not want to stop half way.

Noticing this reluctance, the Prophet returned to his tent and asked Umm Salama, his wife accompanying him at that time, what she thought of the situation. So she told him, fully aware that he did not need her advice. In doing this, he taught Muslim men an important social lesson: There is nothing wrong with exchanging ideas with women on important matters, or on any matters at all.

She said: "O Messenger of God, don't repeat your order. They may resist and thereby perish. Slaughter your sacrificial animal and change out of your pilgrim attire. They will obey, willingly or not, when they see that your order is final."²⁴¹ He immediately took a knife in his hand, went outside, and began to slaughter his sheep. The Companions began to do the same, for now it was clear that his order would not be changed.

Counsel and consultation, like every good deed, were practiced by God's Messenger first within his own family and then in the wider community. Even today, we understand so little about his relationships with his wives that it is as if we are wandering aimlessly around a plot of land, unaware of the vast treasure buried below our feet.

Women are secondary beings in the minds of many, including those self-appointed defenders of women's rights as well as many self-proclaimed Muslim men. For us, a woman

²⁴¹ *Bukhari*, "Shurut," 15.

is part of a whole, a part that renders the other half useful. We believe that when the two halves come together, the true unity of a human being appears. When this unity does not exist, humanity does not exist—nor can Prophethood, sainthood, or even Islam.

Our master encouraged us through his enlightening words to behave kindly to women. He declared: “The most perfect believers are the best in character, and the best of you are the kindest to their families.”²⁴² It is clear that women have received the true honor and respect they deserve, not just in theory but in actual practice, only once in history—during the period of Prophet Muhammad.

The choice God’s Messenger gave to his wives. His wives were given the choice of remaining with him or leaving:

O Prophet, say to your wives: “If you desire the life of this world and its glitter, then come! I will provide for your enjoyment and set you free in a handsome manner. But if you seek God, His Messenger, and the Home of the Hereafter, verily God has prepared for you, the well-doers among you, a great reward.” (33:28-29)

A few of his wives who wanted a more prosperous life asked: “Couldn’t we live a little more luxuriously, like other Muslims do? Couldn’t we have at least a bowl of soup every day, or some prettier garments?” At first sight, such wishes might be considered fair and just. However, they were members of the family that was to be an example for all Muslim families until the Last Day.

The Messenger reacted by going into retreat. The news spread, and everyone rushed to the mosque and began to cry. The smallest grief felt by their beloved Messenger was

²⁴² Abu Dawud, “Sunna,” 15; Tirmidhi, “Rada’,” 11.

enough to bring them all to tears, and even the smallest incident in his life would disturb them. Abu Bakr and 'Umar, seeing the event in a different light as their daughters were directly involved, rushed to the mosque. They wanted to see him, but he would not leave his retreat. Eventually, on their third attempt, they gained entry and began to rebuke their daughters. The Messenger saw what was happening, but only said: "I cannot afford what they want."²⁴³ The Qur'an declared: *O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other women* (33:32).

Others might save themselves by simply fulfilling their obligations, but those who were at the very center of Islam had to devote themselves fully, so that no weakness would appear at the center. There were advantages in being the Prophet's wife, but these advantages brought responsibilities and potential risks. The Messenger was preparing them as exemplars for all present and future Muslim women. He was especially worried that they might enjoy the reward for their good deeds in this world, and thereby be included in: *You have exhausted your share of the good things in your life of the world and sought comfort in them* (46:20).

Life in the Prophet's house was uncomfortable. For this reason, either explicitly or implicitly, his wives made some modest demands. As their status was unique, they were not expected to enjoy themselves in a worldly sense. Some godly people laugh only a few times during their lives; others never fill their stomachs.

For example, Fudayl ibn Iyad never laughed. He smiled only once, and those who saw him do so asked him why he smiled, for they were greatly surprised. He told them:

²⁴³ Muslim, "Talaq," 34, 35.

"Today, I learned that my son 'Ali died. I was happy to hear that God had loved him, and so I smiled."²⁴⁴ If there were such people outside of the Prophets household, his wives, who were even more pious and respectful of God and regarded as "mothers of the believers," would certainly be of a higher degree.

It is not easy to merit being together with the Messenger in this world and the Hereafter. Thus, these special women were put to a great test. The Messenger allowed them to choose his poor home or the worlds luxury. If they choose the world, he would give them whatever they wanted and then dissolve his marriage with them. If they choose God and His Messenger, they had to be content with their lives. This was a peculiarity of his family. Since this family was unique, its members had to be unique. The head of the family was chosen, as were the wives and children.

The Messenger first called 'A'isha and said: "I want to discuss something with you. You'd better talk with your parents before making a decision." Then he recited the verses mentioned above. Her decision was exactly as expected from a truthful daughter of a truthful father: "O Messenger of God, do I need to talk with my parents? By God, I choose God and His Messenger."²⁴⁵

'A'isha herself tells us what happened next: "The Messenger received the same answer from all his wives. No one expressed a different opinion. They all said what I had said." They did so because they were all at one with the Messenger. They could not differ. If the Messenger had told them to fast for a lifetime without break, they would have

²⁴⁴ Abu Nu'aym, *Hilyat al-Awliya'*, 8:100.

²⁴⁵ *Muslim*, "Talaq," 35.

done so, and endured it with pleasure. However, they endured hardship until their deaths.

Some of his wives had enjoyed an extravagant lifestyle before their marriage to him. One of these was Safiyya, who had lost her father and husband, and had been taken prisoner, during the Battle of Khaybar. She must have been very angry with the Messenger, but when she saw him, her feelings changed completely. She endured the same destiny as the other wives. They endured it because love of the Messenger had penetrated their hearts.

Safiyya was a Jewess. Once, she was dismayed when this fact was mentioned to her sarcastically. She informed the Messenger, expressing her sadness. He comforted her saying: "If they repeat it, tell them: 'My father is Prophet Aaron, my uncle is Prophet Moses, and my husband is, as you see, Prophet Muhammad, the Chosen One. What do you have more than me to be proud of?'"²⁴⁶

The Qur'an declares that his wives are the *mothers of the believers* (33:6). Although fourteen centuries have passed, we still feel delight in saying "my mother" when referring to Khadija, 'A'isha, Umm Salama, Hafsa, and his other wives. We feel this because of him. Some feel more love for these women than they do for their real mothers. Certainly, this feeling must have been deeper, warmer, and stronger in the Prophets own time.

The Messenger was the perfect head of a family. Managing many women with ease, being a lover of their hearts, an instructor of their minds, an educator of their souls, he never neglected the affairs of the nation or compromised his duties.

²⁴⁶ Tirmidhi, "Manaqib," 64.

The Messenger excelled in every area of life. People should not compare him to themselves or to the so-called great personalities of their age. Researchers should look at him, the one to whom angels are grateful, always remembering that he excelled in every way. If they want to look for Muhammad they must search for him in his own dimensions. Our imaginations cannot reach him, for we do not even know how to imagine properly. God bestowed upon him, as His special favor, superiority in every field.

God's Messenger and children

He was an extraordinary husband, a perfect father, and a unique grandfather. He was unique in every way. He treated his children and grandchildren with great compassion, and never neglected to direct them to the Hereafter and good deeds. He smiled at them, caressed and loved them, but did not allow them to neglect matters related to the afterlife. In worldly matters he was extremely open; but when it came to maintaining their relationship with God, he was very serious and dignified. He showed them how to lead a humane life, and never allowed them to neglect their religious duties and become spoiled. His ultimate goal was to prepare them for the Hereafter. His perfect balance in such matters is another dimension of his Divinely inspired intellect.

In a *hadith* narrated by Muslim, Anas bin Malik, honored as the Messengers servant for 10 continuous years, says: "I've never seen a man who was more compassionate to his family members than Muhammad."²⁴⁷ If this admission were made just by us, it could be dismissed as unimportant. However, millions of people, so benign and compassionate that they would not even offend an ant, declare that he

²⁴⁷ Muslim, "Fada'il," 63.

embraced everything with compassion. He was a human like us, but God inspired in him such an intimate affection for every living thing that he could establish a connection with all of them. As a result, he was full of extraordinary affection toward his family members and others.

All of the Prophet's sons had died. Ibrahim, his last son born to his Coptic wife Mary, also died in infancy. The Messenger often visited his son before the latter's death, although he was very busy. Ibrahim was looked after by a nurse. The Prophet would embrace, kiss, and caress him before returning home.²⁴⁸ When Ibrahim died, the Prophet took him on his lap again, embraced him, and described his sorrow while on the brink of tears. Some were surprised. He gave them this answer: "Eyes may water and hearts may be broken, but we do not say anything except what God will be pleased with." He pointed to his tongue and said: "God will ask us about this."²⁴⁹

He carried his grandsons Hasan and Husayn on his back. Despite his unique status, he did this without hesitation to herald the honor that they would attain later. One time when they were on his back, Umar came into the Prophets house and, seeing them, exclaimed: "What a beautiful mount you have!" The Messenger added immediately: "What beautiful riders they are!"²⁵⁰

They may not have been aware that the Messenger had honored them. This special compliment was due to their future status as leaders and family heads of the Prophets

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 62.

²⁴⁹ Bukhari, "Jana'iz," 44; Muslim, "Fada'il," 62; Ibn Maja, "Jana'iz," 53.

²⁵⁰ Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummal*, 13:650.

household. Among their descendants would be the greatest and most respected saints. His compliment was not only for his grandsons, but for all his offspring. For this reason, Abd al-Qadir Jilani, a well-known descendant of the Prophets household, said: "The Messengers blessed feet are on my shoulders, and mine are on the shoulders of all saints." This statement will probably stand for all saints to come.

The Messenger was completely balanced in the way he brought up his children. He loved his children and grandchildren very much, and instilled love in them. However, he never let his love for them be abused. None of them deliberately dared to do anything wrong. If they made an unintentional mistake, the Messengers protection prevented them from going even slightly astray. He did this by wrapping them in love and an aura of dignity. For example, once Hasan or Husayn wanted to eat a date that had been given to distribute among the poor as alms. The Messenger immediately took it from his hand, and said: "Anything given as alms is forbidden to us."²⁵¹ In teaching them while they were young to be sensitive to forbidden acts, he established an important principle of education.

Whenever he returned to Madina, he would carry children on his mount. On such occasions, the Messenger embraced not only his grandchildren but also those in his house and those nearby. He conquered their hearts through his compassion. He loved all children.

He loved his granddaughter Umama as much as he loved Hasan and Husayn. He often went out with her on his shoulders, and even placed her on his back while praying. When he prostrated, he put her down; when he had finished, he

²⁵¹ Ibn Hanbal, 2:279; *Muslim*, "Zakat," 161.

placed her on his back again.²⁵² He showed this degree of love to Umama to teach his male followers how to treat girls. This was a vital necessity, for only a decade earlier it had been the social norm to bury infant or young girls alive. Such public paternal affection for a grand-daughter had never been seen before in Arabia.

The Messenger proclaimed that Islam allows no discrimination between son and daughter. How could there be? One is Muhammad, the other is Khadija; one is Adam, the other is Eve; one is Ali, the other is Fatima. For every great man there is a great woman.

Fatima, the daughter of the Messenger, is the mother of all members of his household. She is our mother, too. As soon as Fatima entered, the Messenger would stand, take her hands and make her sit where he had been sitting. He would ask about her health and family, show his paternal love for her, and compliment her.

He loved her like his own self, and Fatima, knowing how fond he was of her, loved him more than her own self. Her great mission was to be the seed for saints and godly people. She always watched her father and how he called people to Islam. She wept and groaned when the Messenger told her that he would die soon, and rejoiced when he told her that she would be the first family member to follow him.²⁵³ Her father loved her, and she loved her father. The Messenger was totally balanced even in his love for Fatima. He trained her for the heights to which the human soul should rise.

²⁵² Bukhari, "Adab," 18; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, 8:39.

²⁵³ Muslim, "Fada'il," 98, 99; Bukhari, "Manaqib," 25.

The Messenger raised her, as well as all of his other family members and Companions, in a way to prepare them for the Hereafter. All of us were created for eternity, and so cannot be satisfied except through eternity and the Eternal Being. Therefore, we only want Him and long for Him, either consciously or unconsciously. The essence of all religions and the message of every Prophet was about the Hereafter. For this reason, the Messenger always sought to prepare his followers for the eternal peace and permanent bliss; meanwhile, his very existence among them was a sample of that peace and bliss they would taste in His presence.

He loved them and directed them toward the Hereafter, to the otherworldly and eternal beauty, and to God. For example, He once saw Fatima wearing a necklace (a bracelet, according to another version), and asked her: "Do you want the inhabitants of the Earth and the Heavens to say that my daughter is holding (or wearing) a chain from Hell?" These few words, coming from a man whose throne was established in her heart and who had conquered all her faculties, caused her to report, in her own words: "I immediately sold the necklace, bought and freed a slave, and then went to the Messenger. When I told him what I had done, he rejoiced. He opened his hands and thanked God: All thanks to God, Who protected Fatima from Hell."²⁵⁴

Fatima did not commit any sin by wearing this necklace. However, the Messenger wanted to keep her in the circle of the *muqarrabin* (those made near to God). His warning to her was based on *taqwa* (righteousness and devotion to God) and *qurb* (nearness to God). This was, in a sense, a neglect of

²⁵⁴ Nasa'i, "Zinat," 39.

worldly things. It is also an example of the sensitivity befitting the mother of the Prophet's household, which represents the Muslim community until the Last Day. To be a mother of such godly men like Hasan, Husayn, and Zayn al-'Abidin was certainly no ordinary task. The Messenger was preparing her to be the mother first of his own household (*Ahl al-Bayt*), and then of those who would descend from them, such great spiritual leaders as Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Muhammad Baha' al-Din al-Naqshband, Ahmad Rifa'i, Ahmad Badawi, al-Shadhili, and the like.

It was as if he were telling her: "Fatima, you will marry a man ('Ali) and go to a house from which many golden rings will emerge in the future. Forget the golden chain on your neck and concentrate on becoming the mother for the golden chains of saints who will appear in the spiritual orders of Naqshbandiya, Rifa'iya, Shadhiliyya, and the like." It was difficult to fulfill such a role while wearing a golden necklace. For this reason, the Messenger was more severe with his own household than with others. He reminded them of the straight path by turning their faces toward the other world, closing all the windows opening on this world, and telling them that what they need is God.

They were to lead their whole lives looking to the other world. For this reason, as a sign of his love, the Messenger purified his own household from all worldly rubbish and allowed no worldly dust to contaminate them. He turned their faces toward the exalted realms and prepared them for being together there.

"You are with those whom you love"

According to this *hadith*, if you love Prophet Muhammad you will be on his path, and those on his path will be together with him in the world beyond. To prepare his household

and Companions for this gathering, the Messenger loved and embraced them. He used this love efficiently.

Bukhari and Muslim gave another example of how he educated them. ‘Ali narrates that:

We had no servant in our house, and so Fatima did all the housework by herself. We lived in a house with just a small room. There, she would light a fire and try to cook. She often singed her clothes while trying to increase the fire by blowing. She also baked our bread and carried water. Her hands became covered in cal-luses from turning the millstone, as did her back from carrying water. Meanwhile some prisoners of war were brought to Madina. The Messenger gave them to those who applied. I suggested to Fatima that she ask for a servant from her father. And she did.

Fatima continues:

I went to my father, but he was not at home. ‘A’isha said she would tell him when he came, so I returned home. As soon as we went to bed, the Messenger came in. We wanted to get up, but he did not let us and instead sat between us. I could feel the cold of his foot on my body. He asked what we wanted, and I explained the situation. The Messenger, in an awe-some manner, replied: “Fatima, fear God and be faultless in all your duties to Him. I will tell you something. When you want to go to bed, say *subhan Allah* (All glory be to God), *al-hamdu li-Allah* (All praise be to God), and *Allahu akbar* (God is the great-est) 33 times each. This is better for you than having a maid.”²⁵⁵

What he was actually saying through this conversation was:

²⁵⁵ Bukhari, “Fada’il al-Ashab,” 9; Muslim, “Dhikr,” 80, 81.

I am turning your faces to the otherworldly realms. There are two ways for you to reach them and be together with me there: Fulfill your duties in perfect servitude to your Lord and fulfill your duties to your husband. If a maid takes your responsibilities, this may make you deficient. You must have two wings to fly to the higher ranks. How can a man or woman become a perfect slave of God? How can a person become a perfect human being and fulfill all of his or her obligations? It is your duty to find the answers to these questions. First of all, become a perfect slave of God. Then, become a perfect human being by performing your duties to 'Ali, a great man who represents all the saints who will descend from your family. If you do so, you will be with me in Heaven, where all the perfect things and perfect human beings shall come together.

I cannot help but digress to mention a fact about 'Ali. The Messenger gave him his daughter in marriage without hesitation, because he deserved to have such a wife and to be a Prophet's son-in-law. 'Ali was the king of saints, and was created in this nature. The Messenger told him: "O 'Ali, every other Prophet had his own offspring. However, mine will come from you."²⁵⁶ 'Ali is the father of the Prophet's household, namely, his grandchildren and later descendants. For this reason, obeying 'Ali means obeying the Messenger, and obeying the Messenger means obeying God. Also, those who love 'Ali should love the Prophet and follow his Sunna.

Why he had more than one wife

Some critics of Islam, either because they do not know the reasons for these marriages or because they want to portray him as a self-indulgent libertine, have accused the Messenger of character failings that are incompatible with

²⁵⁶ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Lemalar*, 4. "Lema."

having even average virtue, let alone with the virtue of God's final Messenger and best example for humanity. The facts, all of which are easily available in scores of biographies and well-authenticated accounts of his sayings and actions, refute all such allegations and show that these marriages were part of a strictly disciplined life and yet another burden he had to bear.

The reasons behind his several marriages, while differing from case to case, all have to do with his role as the leader of the new Muslim community, and his responsibility to guide his followers toward the norms and values of Islam.

Muhammad married his first wife when he was 25 years old, 15 years before his Prophethood began. Given the cultural and moral climate in which he lived, not to mention his youth and other factors, he nevertheless enjoyed a sound reputation for chastity, integrity, and trustworthiness. As soon as he was called to Prophethood, he acquired enemies who made all sorts of charges. However, not even his fiercest enemies attacked his reputation, for doing so would have caused them to be ridiculed and discredited immediately. It is important to realize that his life was founded upon chastity and self-discipline from the outset, and so remained.

When he was 25 and in the prime of life, Muhammad married Khadija, a widow 15 years his senior. This marriage was very high and exceptional in the eyes of the Prophet and God. For 23 years, this devoted couple lived together in complete contentment and fidelity. The Prophet took no other wives while Khadija was alive, although public opinion and social norms would have allowed this. Even his enemies admitted that, during these years, they could find no flaw in

his moral character. When she died during the eighth year of Prophethood, the Prophet found himself single once again, but this time with children. He remained unmarried for 4 or 5 years. All of his other marriages began when he was 53 years old or older, a age when very little real interest and desire for marriage remains, especially in Arabia where people grow old relatively earlier. Thus, allegations of licentiousness or self-indulgence are groundless.

People often ask how a Prophet can have more than one wife. There are three points to be made in answering this question. But, let's first see who is asking this question. Mostly, they are either Christians or Jews (People of the Book), or atheists. As such people usually know next to nothing about Islam, their question is based either on genuine ignorance or the desire to spread doubt among believers.

Those who neither believe in nor practice a religion have no right to reproach those who do. Such people are known for their casual relations and liaisons with numerous sexual partners and their refusal to follow any moral rules or ethics. Their disguised yet unrestrained self-indulgence, as well as their refusal to consider its consequences upon themselves and young people in general, not to mention their own children, has had serious social repercussions. Considering themselves free, they engage in what most societies consider to be immoral behavior: incest, homosexuality, polyandry (multiple husbands at the same time), and others. They never stop to consider what effect such practices have on the children of such unions.

When we understand this, we can take their criticisms for what they are: a desire, whether conscious or otherwise, to drag believers into the mess of moral confusion and viciousness in which they themselves are trapped.

One wonders why Jews and Christians attack the Prophet for his multiple marriages. Have they forgotten that the great Hebrew patriarchs, considered Prophets in the Bible and in the Qur'an and revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims as exemplars of moral excellence, all practiced polygamy? Moreover, as in the case of Prophet Solomon,²⁵⁷ they had far more wives than Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace. One wonders if they are moved more by their anti-Islam bias than genuine concern or interest.

Polygamy did not begin with the Muslims. Furthermore, in the case of the Prophet of Islam, it was an essential part of conveying the message of Islam and bringing unbelievers into its fold. For example, a religion that encompasses every sphere of life cannot be shy when it comes to intimate matters. Such things can only be known by ones spouse. Therefore, there must be women who can give clear instruction and advice, as such matters cannot be left to the usual allusions, hints, and innuendoes. The Prophet's wives functioned as teachers who conveyed and explained to other women, as well as men, Islamic norms and rules for correct domestic, marital, and other private concerns.

Some marriages were contracted for specific reasons, such as:

- Since his wives were young, middle-aged, and elderly, the requirements and norms of Islamic law could be applied correctly to each stage of their lives and experiences. These provisions were learned and applied within the Prophet's household and then conveyed to other Muslims through his wives.

²⁵⁷ According to I Kings 11:3, Solomon had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines.

- Each wife was from a different clan or tribe, which allowed him to establish bonds of kinship and affinity throughout Arabia. This caused a profound attachment to him to spread among the diverse peoples of the new Muslim community, and also created and secured equality, brotherhood, and sisterhood among both in practical matters and in terms of religion.
- Both before and after the Prophet's death, each wife proved to be of great benefit and service. They conveyed and interpreted Islam to their people in all its inner and outer experiences, as well as the qualities, manners, and faith of the man who was living embodiment of the Qur'an in *every* aspect of his life. In this way, their people learned the Qur'an, the Traditions, *tafsir* (Qur'anic interpretation and commentary), and *fiqh* (understanding of the Islamic law), and so became fully aware of Islam's essence and spirit.
- These marriages allowed Prophet Muhammad to establish kinship ties throughout Arabia, and thus to move freely wherever he wished and to be accepted as a member in each family. In addition, everyone so connected to him felt that they could approach him personally for guidance on any issue. The entire tribe also benefited from this connection; they considered themselves fortunate and took pride in their new relationship. For example, such relationships were established for the Umayyads (through Umm Habiba), the Hashimites (through Zaynab bint Jahsh), and the Banu Makhzum (through Umm Salama).

So far, what we have said is general and could, in some respects, be true of all Prophets. However, now we will give brief life sketches of these women, not in the order of marriage but from a different perspective.

Khadija was the Prophet's first wife. When they married, she was 40; he was 25. She was the mother of all his children except for his son Ibrahim, who did not survive infancy. But she was more than just his wife—she was his friend who shared his inclinations and ideals to a remarkable degree. Their marriage was wonderfully blessed, and they lived together in profound harmony for 23 years. Through every outrage and persecution heaped upon him by the Makkans, Khadija was his dearest companion and helper. He loved her deeply, and married no other woman while she was alive.

This marriage presents the ideal forms of intimacy, friendship, mutual respect, support, and consolation. Though faithful and loyal to all his wives, he never forgot Khadija; for the rest of his life, he often mentioned her virtues and merits. The Prophet did not remarry for 4 or 5 years after her death. Providing his children's daily food and provisions, bearing their troubles and hardships, caused him to be both a father and a mother. To allege that such a man was a sensualist or lusted after women is beyond belief. If there were even the least grain of truth in it, he could not have lived as history records that he did.

'A'isha, his second wife (though not in the order of marriage), was the daughter of Abu Bakr, his closest friend and devoted follower. One of the earliest converts to Islam, this man had long hoped to cement the deep attachment between himself and the Prophet by giving 'A'isha to him in marriage. His acceptance of this arrangement conferred the highest honor and courtesy on a man who had shared all the good and bad times with him throughout his mission.

'A'isha, who proved to be a remarkably intelligent and wise woman, had both the nature and temperament to carry

forward the work of Prophetic mission. Her marriage prepared her to be a spiritual guide and teacher to all women. She became a major student and disciple of the Prophet and through him, like so many Muslims of that blessed time, she matured and perfected her skills and talents so that she could join him in the abode of bliss both as wife and as student. Her life and service to Islam after her marriage prove that such an exceptional person was worthy to be the Prophet's wife.

Over time, she proved to be one of the greatest authorities on *hadith*, an excellent Qur'anic commentator, and a most distinguished and knowledgeable expert (*faqih*) in Islamic law. She truly represented the inner and outer qualities and experiences of Prophet Muhammad through her unique understanding.

Umm Salama, of the Makhzum clan, was first married to her cousin. The couple had embraced Islam at the very beginning and emigrated to Abyssinia to avoid Qurayshi persecution. After their return, they migrated to Madina with their four children. Her husband participated in many battles and, severely wounded at Uhud, attained martyrdom shortly thereafter. Abu Bakr and 'Umar proposed marriage, aware of her needs and suffering as a widow with children but without means to support them. She refused, believing that no one could be better than her late husband.

Some time after that, the Prophet offered to marry her. This was quite right and natural, for this great woman, who had never shied from sacrifice and suffering for Islam, was now alone after having passed many years among the noblest Arab clan. She could not be neglected and left to beg her way in life. Considering her piety, sincerity, and all that she had suffered, she deserved to be helped. By marry-

ing her, the Prophet was doing what he had been doing since his youth, namely, befriending those lacking friends, supporting those without support, and protecting those without protection.

Umm Salama also was intelligent and quick in comprehension. She had all the capacities and gifts to become a spiritual guide and teacher. After her marriage to the Prophet, she became a new student in the school of knowledge and guidance, one to whom all women would be grateful. Let us recall that, at this time, the Prophet was approaching the age of sixty. His marriage to a widow with four children and acceptance of all related expenses and responsibilities can be understood only in terms of his infinite reserves of humanity and compassion.

Umm Habiba was the daughter of Abu Sufyan who, for a long time, was the Prophet's bitterest foe and strongest supporter of unbelief. But despite this, his daughter was one of the earliest converts to Islam and emigrated to Abyssinia with her husband. Her husband died there, leaving her alone and desperate in exile.

At that time, the few Companions had problems supporting even themselves. She was faced with several options: conversion to Christianity in return for Abyssinian Christian support (unthinkable); return to her father's home, now a headquarters of the war against Islam (unthinkable); or go begging from household to household. This last option was just as unthinkable as the other two, but had the added disadvantage that if she were forced to do so, she would bring shame upon her family name, as it was one of the richest and noblest Arab families.

God recompensed Umm Habiba for all that she lost or sacrificed in the way of Islam. She had been reduced to a

lonely exile and a grieving widow in an insecure environment among people who were racially and religiously different from her. The Prophet, learning of her plight, sent an offer of marriage through the king Negus. This noble and generous action is a practical proof of: *We have not sent you save as a mercy for all creatures* (21:107).

Through this marriage, Abu Sufyan's powerful family was linked with the person and household of the Prophet, a fact that caused them to rethink their opposition. It also is correct to trace this marriages influence beyond Abu Sufyan's immediate family and to the Umayyads, who ruled the Muslims for almost a hundred years. This clan, whose members had been the most hostile to Islam, went on to produce some of Islam's most renowned warriors, administrators, and governors in the early period. It was his marriage to Umm Habiba that began this change: the Prophet's depth of generosity and magnanimity of soul surely overwhelmed them.

Zaynab bint Jahsh was a lady of noble birth and descent, as well as a close relative of the Prophet. She also was a woman of great piety, who fasted a great deal, kept long vigils, and gave generously to the poor. When the Prophet made known to her parents that he wished her to marry Zayd (at one time his adopted son), both she and her family were at first unwilling. The family had hoped to marry their daughter to the Prophet. Naturally, when they realized that it was the Prophet's wish that she marry Zayd, they all consented out of their love for the Prophet and his authority.

As mentioned above, the Messenger made this marriage to abolish several pagan customs: a freed ex-slave could not marry a free-born woman, racial prejudice (Zayd was black;

Zaynab was not), an adoptive father could not marry his adopted sons ex-wife or widow. The marriage did not bring happiness to either person. Both were devout Muslims and loved the Prophet, but they were not compatible. Zayd several times asked the Prophet to allow him to divorce Zaynab, but the Prophet told him to be patient and not divorce her. Then, once when the Prophet was talking with some people, Gabriel came and a Divine Revelation was given to him.²⁵⁸ This verse announced the Prophet's marriage to Zaynab as a bond already contracted: *We have married her to you* (33:37).

There was no lust involved here. Rather, it was such a severe trial that 'A'isha later said: "Had the Messenger of God been inclined to suppress anything of what was revealed to him, he would surely have suppressed this verse."²⁵⁹

Juwayriya bint Harith, daughter of the defeated Banu Mustaliq clans chief, was captured during a military expedition. She was held, like other members of her proud family, alongside her clans "common" people. She was in considerable distress when taken to the Prophet, not least because her kinsmen had lost everything and she really hated the Muslims. The Prophet understood her wounded pride and dignity, and how to heal them. He agreed to pay her ransom, set her free, and offered to marry her.

How gladly Juwayriya accepted this offer can easily be imagined. About 100 families were freed when the Ansar and the Muhajirun learned that the Bani Mustaliq were now related to the Prophet by marriage. A tribe so honored could not

²⁵⁸ Bukhari, "Tawhid," 22.

²⁵⁹ Bukhari and Muslim.

be allowed to remain in slavery.²⁶⁰ In this way, the hearts of Juwayriyah and all her people were won.

Safiyya was the daughter of Huyayy, a chieftain of the Jews of Khaybar, who had persuaded the Bani Qurayza to break their treaty with the Prophet. She had seen her family and relatives oppose the Prophet since her youth. In the Battle of Khaybar, she lost her father, brother, and husband, and herself was captured.

The attitudes and actions of her family and relatives might have caused her to nurture a deep hatred of and desire for revenge against the Muslims. But 3 days before the Prophet's appearance in front of Khaybar's citadel, Safiyya had dreamed of a brilliant moon coming from Madina, moving toward Khaybar, and falling into her lap.

She later said: "When I was captured, I began to hope that my dream would come true." When she was brought before the Prophet, he generously set her free and offered her the choice of remaining a Jewess and returning to her people or entering Islam and becoming his wife. "I chose God and his Messenger," she said. They were married shortly thereafter.

Elevated to the Prophet's household and now a "mother of the believers," she experienced first-hand the Companions' honorable and respectful treatment. She saw the refinement and true courtesy of those who had submitted their hearts and minds to God. Her attitude to her past experiences changed altogether, and she came to appreciate the great honor of being the Prophet's wife. This marriage also changed the attitude of many Jews, as they came to see and know the Prophet closely.

²⁶⁰ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 6:277

Sawda bint Zam‘a was Sakran’s widow. This couple had been among the first to embrace Islam and emigrate to Abyssinia. Sakran died in exile and left his wife utterly destitute. To relieve her distress, Prophet Muhammad married her, although he was facing great difficulties in meeting his own daily needs. This marriage took place some time after Khadija’s death.

Hafsa was the daughter of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, the future second caliph of Islam. Also an exile in Abyssinia and then an immigrant in Madina, she was widowed when her husband attained martyrdom in the path of God. She remained without a husband for a while. ‘Umar wished for the honor and blessing of being close to the Prophet in this world and the Hereafter, just as Abu Bakr had, and so the Prophet married her to protect and help his faithful disciple’s daughter.

Such were the circumstances and motives behind the Prophets several marriages. There was no lust involved. Rather, he married them to provide helpless or widowed women with a dignified subsistence; to console and honor enraged or estranged tribespeople by bringing former enemies into some degree of relationship and harmony; to gain certain uniquely gifted individuals, in particular some exceptionally talented women, for the cause of Islam; to establish new norms of relationship between different people within the unifying brotherhood of faith in God; and to honor with family bonds the men who were to be his immediate political successors.

These marriages had nothing to do with self-indulgence, personal desire, or lust. With the exception of ‘A’isha, all of his wives were widows, and all of his marriages (except for that with Khadija) were contracted when he was already an

old man. Far from being acts of self-indulgence, these marriages were acts of self-discipline.

The Prophet was given a special Divine dispensation, one unique to his person, to have this number of wives. The Revelation restricting polygamy came after he had contracted all of these marriages. After that event, he also was forbidden to marry again.

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